



NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE

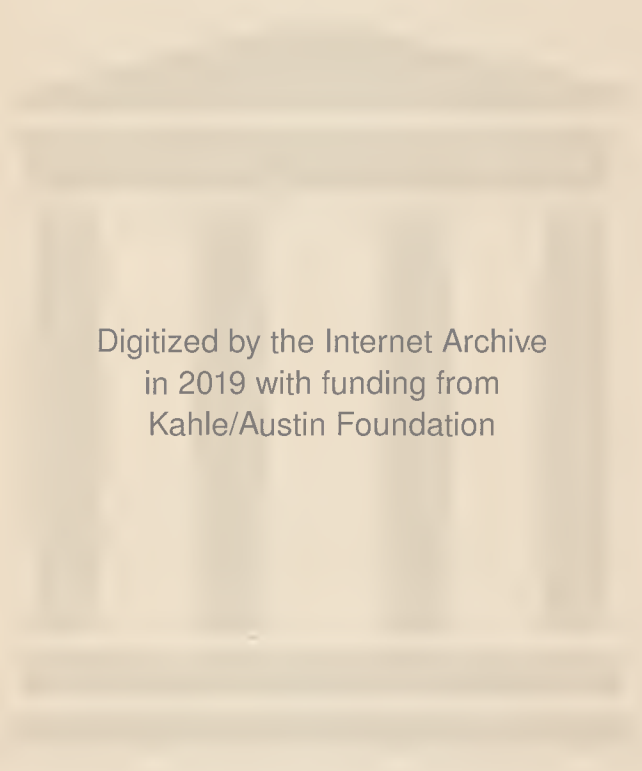


THOMAS J. BATA LIBRARY  
TRENT UNIVERSITY









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2019 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation

## BREAKERS AND GRANITE



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

NEW YORK BOSTON • CHICAGO • DALLAS  
ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED

LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.

TORONTO



# Breakers and Granite

BY

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

Author of "The Tree of Life"

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1921

All rights reserved

PS 3311 L45787 1921

COPYRIGHT, 1921,

BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

---

Set up and electrotyped. Published March, 1921.

TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER AND MOTHER  
WHO GAVE TO ME ALL THAT  
MADE THESE POEMS  
POSSIBLE

222611



Thanks are due to the editors of *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The Poetry Review of America*, *The Anglo-French Review*, *The Little Review*, *The Craftsman*, *The Egoist*, and *Others*, for their permission to reprint some of these poems.



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE ARRIVAL . . . . .	I
II NEW YORK . . . . .	5
III MANHATTAN . . . . .	8
IV SKYSCRAPERS . . . . .	15
V NEW YORK SKETCHES:—	
1. OVERLOOKING THE HUDSON, AUTUMN . . .	17
2. CENTRAL PARK . . . . .	19
3. BROADWAY'S CANYON . . . . .	20
4. THE ALLEYWAYS . . . . .	22
5. OLD JEWISH CEMETERY . . . . .	24
6. LONGUE VUE . . . . .	25
VI IN NEW ENGLAND:—	
1. NEW ENGLAND SUNSET . . . . .	26
2. NEW ENGLAND WINTER . . . . .	30
3. BOSTON — THE EMPTY HOUSE . . . . .	32
4. CLIPPER-SHIPS . . . . .	35
VII CHICAGO:—	
1. LAKE SHORE AT NIGHT . . . . .	42
2. THE BUILDING OF CHICAGO . . . . .	44
VIII DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI:—	
1. EMBARKATION . . . . .	49
2. HEAT . . . . .	51

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
3. FULL MOON . . . . .	52
4. THE MOON'S ORCHESTRA . . . . .	53
5. THE STEVEDORES . . . . .	55
6. NIGHT LANDING . . . . .	56
7. THE SILENCE . . . . .	57
IX THE OLD SOUTH:—	
1. THE OLD SOUTH . . . . .	58
2. THE GREAT RIVER . . . . .	64
3. GETTYSBURG . . . . .	79
4. THE PASSING OF THE SOUTH . . . . .	90
X THE FAR WEST:—	
1. THE GRAND CANYON OF THE COLORADO . . . . .	95
2. ARIZONA POEMS (6 PARTS) . . . . .	100
3. THE SONG OF THE WIND . . . . .	114
4. THE PASSING OF THE WEST . . . . .	117
XI SONGS OF THE ARKANSAS:—	
1. INVOCATION . . . . .	127
2. WOMEN'S SONG . . . . .	131
3. WAR-SONG . . . . .	133
4. DEATH-SONG . . . . .	138
XII AMERICAN SYMPHONY:—	
1. IN THE CITY OF NIGHT . . . . .	140
2. AMERICA, 1916 . . . . .	144
3. THE POEM OF MIST . . . . .	150
4. LINCOLN . . . . .	158



# BREAKERS AND GRANITE

## THE ARRIVAL

The ship glides softly in,  
Mist clings about the harbour;  
The muddy, oily Hudson  
Is scattered with driftwood darkening the tide;

The ship glides in and stops.  
The tide has ebbed all night and now will turn.  
Grey wraiths, the skyscrapers  
Loom in the mist, white smoke about them blowing.

Dense, dreary rain  
Lashes the waters of the harbour;  
The air hangs flat, unstirring,  
The land looms, dead ahead.

The dark, lead-coloured piers  
Covered with roofs, crouch low beside the shore;  
The ship glides near to one of these and turns.  
Beyond the city lies, rain-veiled.

Tugs gliding easily,  
Brown tugs with pilot-houses perched atop,  
Windowed with glass, their poised gilt eagles shining,  
Nose up between the swinging ship and the shore,

The Henry K. Jewett fastens to her bows.  
The Brandon follows  
Puffing soft-coal smoke in dense feathery billows;  
The Martin B. Flannery finds a midship berth.

Tug after tug assembles,  
One after the other till nine tugs are gathered.  
A dense array of funnels, black, dun, red,  
Between the waiting ship and the pier head.  
Then on a sudden they release their steam.

With rocking shocks, with throb of beating engines,  
With plumed salutes of smoke above slim funnels,  
With racing shake of blades that trample up the  
water,  
They keep their blunt beaks pressed against our  
side.

Minute on minute passes:  
The ship hangs yet unstirring.  
Out of the pilot-houses faces peer  
And stare up at the wallowing bulk beyond.

Nine columns of flying smoke  
Blue-black or feathery-grey, upcurled and hurried,  
Rise tumbling to the sky  
In shadowy rushing hosts to bar our inward path.

And still the ship stirs not.  
She fights the swirl of water by her side,  
Till a tenth tug, from somewhere suddenly summoned,  
Comes tooting up her whistle, loudly,  
Out of the dense grey fog, half-filled with waving  
ferry boats.

Then, suddenly,  
The sheer white bows swing inward,  
Quivering in every fibre,  
Towards the waiting dock-end of the shed.

One after one the tugs slip off,  
Backing and churning at the raging water.  
The weary ship slips in  
To the dark quiet of her berth at last;

So you, America,  
Have taken men from their free-swinging gait

About the seas of the world, and pinned them to  
the shore,

By the harsh effort of your shoving hands.

May 20, 1920.

## NEW YORK

Out of the black granite she is rising surprising  
as sunrise over the head of the Sphinx; glittering  
towers coated in linked scales that seem as if they  
might melt away, they are so pale, but that day  
pours multitudes about them to smile and to threaten,  
to sin and to 'scape the reckoning, to coagulate in  
iron knots against fate, to blot out life's misery with  
rejoicing, to clamour and to pray.

Restless hammers are carving new cities from the  
stagnant skies.

Beneath, the earth is propped and caverned;  
monstrous halls drop with vaulted echoing roofs  
dripping and sorrowful far below; the bells toll  
and the trains start slowly, clanging, shaking the  
earth and the sad towers above them as they go  
banging their cargo of lost ones towards the secret  
gates of the sea, falling, falling with thunder and  
flame, roaring and crawling, shooting and dying  
away.

Restless hammers are carving new cities from the  
stagnant skies.

Aloft, red girders of rivetted steel hang motion-

less over the abyss; down below the traffic slides, and from the precipitous sides unroll golden threads like spiders' contriving carrying their freight. Men with hammers are striving to fasten new projections to the edifice; and from the last impenetrable over-hanging beam, a man is dangling on his belly guiding the weight; the clouds explode in hissing ripples of snow about him; the skies are dim and the stream of life falls through them sighing like wheat that crashes into the hopper. But the vast pinnacles eat into the clouds and from their bronze sides pours down the day, sweeping away the sordid flood of men in streams of shining glory.

Restless hammers are carving new cities from the stagnant skies.

Screaming and flickering like loosened floods of blue flame, the streets run together amid the houses that huddle and leap and lower over them. The houses quiver with rage and heat from heads to feet; the façades seem wavering, toppling, tearing with their weight; the glaring panes bulge outwards, and the bent red girders ooze away beneath them. But above it all, above all the chaos, the struggle, and the loss, the clouds part. Ivory and gold, heart of light petrified, bold and immortally beautiful, lifts a tower like a full lily stalk with

crammed pollen-coated petals, flame-calyx, fretted  
and carven, white phœnix that beats its wings in  
the light, shrill ecstasy of leaping lines poised in  
flight, partaker of joy in the skies, mate of the sun.

Restless hammers are carving new cities from the  
stagnant skies.

December 4, 1914.

## MANHATTAN

### I

White lily hammered out of steel,  
Upspraying, strangely beautiful,  
Chaste with thrice-tempered passion: —  
About your roots should be the peace  
Of still clean gardens and straight walks;  
The sad blue hills and the high skies  
Should shrink back from the calm of you.

But at your feet shrill furnaces roar,  
Iron rails are clanking; hammers pound  
Their stubborn strength to nothingness;  
Shovels have scraped the russet flanks  
Of the smooth hillside; through the gash  
Dribbles red slag and rusty ore,  
While grey smoke flecks unspotted skies.

White lily, swaying, tremulous,  
Chance-fashioned by some muddled, vague,  
Unthinking fool half-blind with light;



In petal on petal you yet hold  
Aloft, the sprinkled dew of stars  
While dull and muddied are your leaves.

The noise of hatred that dies not  
Is snarling and yelping at your feet;  
Red trickles of oily waste, the scum  
Scarce nourishes your spade-hacked sides;  
You are breaking, my own lonely flower,  
You are falling withered, without strength,  
You that feared not the solitude  
Of all the skies, must snap at last.

And if you should fail: —  
If you should not maintain  
That still austere delight,  
The fools who made you, bought with lives and  
pain:  
If you must crash down to the red soft night,—  
You twisted flame of strength men tore from  
earth and froze —  
If you should break — my heart would break  
with you.

## II

Half-frightened by the tangled mass  
Of endless forests that from the west  
Thrust their green tentacles up the rock;  
Half-tempted by the mourning sea,  
That up the inlet stealthily crooks  
One long green finger beckoning them:  
A little knot of giants wait,  
And on their foreheads is the dawn.  
Some are like shapeless athletes; some  
Haggard spare hunters dressed in grey;  
Some glower in black hate aloof:  
And one incredibly golden-pale,  
White-breasted, cool-flanked, in her joy  
Claps her pink palms to greet the day,  
Not knowing why.

And here they wait:  
While up against them raves the sea.  
And all day's gates of fretted gold  
Are open to them, the wide blue floor  
Of sky is open: they blink at it;  
They do not know what to make of it;  
Half-furtively they question it;  
But there is no reply.

They only know, that along ago  
Across the seas to land there came,  
One with embittered lips and eyes of flame,  
The rebel Angel;  
He found them dull, warm, shapeless clay,  
And half in mockery, made strange Gods:  
Then with the spark hid in his breast,  
He quickened them, and went his way.

And still they wait;  
And at the eastern gate  
Gurgles and seethes the sea reproachfully,  
Crying to them, "How long will you wait?  
For the afternoon is gone by, the cool of the  
day.  
The thunder of God will soon seek you un-  
bidden;  
Do you not hear grim laughter from afar?  
Step boldly out to us; follow the dawn's new  
star."

Yet, still aloof, they hesitate,  
Smiling and deaf, huge childlike gods,  
And never think that soon to come  
Out of the seas in mail of light,  
His face a mystery of flame,

Will rise the Angel with the Sword;  
To give them love, but not the power  
To make their love more strong than death;  
To shut them out from that strange garden  
In which by chance they came to be.

## III

Crash of plates, dribble of plates,  
Bang of plates, clatter of plates,  
Tick — tick — tick of plates,  
Screaming — screaming — screaming.

Plates sliding on slippery floors,  
Plates bouncing off shiny walls,  
Shrieking and clanking past my ears:  
“Time — Time — Time —”

Stupid faces, vulgar faces,  
Flurried faces, worried faces,  
Food is cheap: time is dear:  
Snatch five minutes ere the dynamo clicks:  
“Time — Time —”

Tinkle of plates, mutter of plates,  
Scramble of plates, shamble of plates,

China coffins, each one enclosing an instant —  
Without the hungry skyscrapers wait for men.

## IV

Draped in soft-shaded robes of light,  
In sullen darkness helmeted,  
Glittering with coppery foil;  
In row on row they stand like women  
Slender or squat, lovely or vile,  
Offering themselves casually  
To the cold lips of debauchee Night.

Erect and pale; strange, beautiful,  
Their looks fixed on the distant skies,  
They dream — of what thing do they dream?  
In the dull forest some red hunter  
Perhaps sleeps yet — he who will tame them:  
And when his sinews press upon them,  
All unashamed, their garments then will fall.

Hawked, peddled, cheapened, made more vile  
each instant,  
Soiled and yet chaste, aloof from any passion,  
They watch incuriously the nights' betrayal:

Stale scented hands and liquorish lips have  
brushed theirs,  
They do not heed them, nor harsh voices gab-  
bling,  
For with virginal joy they tremble for the  
dawn.

November 24 — December 4, 1914.

## SKYSCRAPERS

What are these, angels or demons,  
Or steel and stone?  
Soaring, alert,  
Striped with diversified windows,  
These sweep aloft  
And the multitude crane their necks to them: —  
Are they angels, or demons,  
Or stone?

If the grey sapless people,  
Moving along the street, thought them angels,  
They too would be beautiful,  
Erect and laughing to the sky for joy.  
If as demons they feared them,  
They would smite with fierce hatred  
These brown haughty foreheads:  
They would not suffer them to hold the sun in  
trust.

What are they, then, angels, or demons,  
Or stone?

Deaf sightless towers  
Unendowed yet with life;  
Soaring vast effort  
Spent in the sky till it breaks there.  
You men of my country  
Who shaped these proud visions,  
You have yet to find godhead  
Not here, but in the human heart.

May 25, 1920.



## NEW YORK SKETCHES

### OVERLOOKING THE HUDSON, AUTUMN

A tinge of russet, purple, blue; vague heights,  
Ribbons of turquoise threaded with russet-brown;  
A sail of thin silk quivers like a butterfly,  
By chimneys and a long squat bulk with towers.

Slim motionless tree-stems are carelessly scattered,  
Like points of exclamation in the stillness.  
A brown-hulled boat buzzes about in the fore-  
ground,  
A slow barge loaded deep with painted bars of steel  
Glowing like a heap of rubies.

Haze curls, drifts, floats, subsides, and lifts itself;  
Making the distance delicately unreal,  
As a pearl cloud upon the sky;  
Masking the river like a stream of silk,

18      OVERLOOKING THE HUDSON, AUTUMN

Will this water-colour ecstasy,  
This delicate fan of cool tones blending,  
Consume the great black factories yonder,  
Or will the factories shatter it?

## CENTRAL PARK

A frieze in movement,  
Faces to the sunlight,  
Curved necks, keen ears, long sweep of splendid  
    tails,  
Quivering hoofs rattling,  
Keen flanks quivering,  
Like flames the millionaires pass in the morning;  
Out of the earth they seem to spring,  
And pass  
Clattering,  
Between the windblown clouds and the motionless  
    mournful trees.  
These are the children of the sun:  
Carelessly galloping  
Towards the dull wavering storm-cloud uprising  
    with mutters and flashes of flame,  
With tragic unseeing smiles  
They go on.

## BROADWAY'S CANYON

### I

This is like the nave of an unfinished cathedral  
With steep shadowy sides.  
Light and shade alternate,  
Repeat and die away.  
Golden traceries of sunlight,  
Blue buttresses of shadow,  
Answer like pier and column,  
All the way down to the sea.

But the temple is still roofless:  
Only the sky above it  
Closes it round, encircling  
With its weightless vault of blue.  
There is no image or inscription or altar,  
And the clamour of free-moving multitudes  
Are its tireless organ tones,  
While the hammers beat out its chimes.

## II

Blue grey smoke swings heavily,  
Fuming from leaden censers,  
Upwards about the street.  
Lamps glimmer with crimson points of flame.  
The black canyon  
Bares its gaunt, stripped sides.  
Heavily, oppressively, the skies roll on above it,  
Like curses yet unfulfilled.  
The wind shrieks and crashes,  
The burly trucks rumble;  
Ponderous as funeral-cars, undraped, and unstrewn  
with flowers.

## THE ALLEYWAYS

Between the square resolute buildings  
That shatter and refract the sun,  
Hidden away the alleyways  
Mourn in blue gloom.

A cart is unloading square cases,  
It rattles on the granite and disappears.  
A man slinks in as if some hidden sin  
Followed him with its fears.

When the streets are freshly lighted,  
And the pleasure-lamps know their power;  
Down the worn stairways of the alleyways,  
The ghosts creep — it is their hour.

In a blue mist half-wavering,  
They choke up the alleyway:  
Amid the slush and the rubbish,  
They clutter grey.

All the failures and incomplete efforts,  
Are theirs to toil with and keep:  
They seem to be striving to build dream-castles  
While the city is asleep.

In the morning up the dizzy-limbed ladders,  
That crawl down into the muck,  
Wearily the nimble ghosts lift themselves,  
Like blue smoke.

A cart is unloading square cases,  
It rumbles away with a bitter refrain;  
And the sense of effort unfinished,  
Throbs and thumps at each window pane.

## OLD JEWISH CEMETERY

Barred in on three sides by dark windowed build-  
ings,

They wait, the exiles who afar were scattered;  
After so many centuries,  
United here at last.

The city does not heed them,  
It does not think on old lips worn with praying,  
On old eyes grey with sorrow,  
On old hands folded with grief.

After so many centuries,  
The stones stand here upon an alien soil.  
In the midst of the hurry and scorn of a too eager  
city,—

Until Jerusalem rises like a bride,  
Out of some great new daybreak;  
Facing the hidden far-off east, they wait.



## LONGUE VUE

Across the Hudson, a mile away, loom pale brown  
cliffs, the Palisades:

On the verandah here, bored couples eat, lifting  
their tea in jewelled hands.

Between them goes the river seaward, frowning  
brown shadow, naked light.

A steamer cuts through it, shooting outwards rip-  
ples in patterns of blue and brown.

Gods of this land who shaped these cliffs, whose  
fireless altars no one heeds,

Make peace between me and these rocks, let me not  
face their force in vain;

Be in my heart a barrier, as clean and cold and  
stark as these,

To shut out sense of silken hose and gewgawed  
ornaments of lawns.

December 1914 — June 1920.

## NEW ENGLAND SUNSET

The sky, blue of metal, through which the sun blows in passing many a hammered petal of gold, rose, vermillion, from its frozen lips. The water deepest blue of sapphires, glancing flint-shaped play of wavelets out of which the sun strikes coppery fires. The earth smooth blue of granite; bald scarps undulating, modulating; brown, grey-brown, blue-grey and blue. The trees brittle coral, blue and silver, birch and maple, crackling, shaking thinner than coral ever grew.

Gurgle, boom, surge: the sea is scouring and worrying the granite. All day long under the wind that roars down from northeastward, the tide has been rising: wrinkled waves of bluish steel tipped with magic sprays of ice. The shallow water clashes and falls in tinkling crystals and waterfalls over the shaggy jagged sides. The tide is not yet fully risen although it is near sunset. In the west a few dull smoky-purple clouds resist yet the full flood of trebly refined light which the sun is pouring still from a gap between the hills. Surge, boom and gurgle: the granite rocks and thrills.

From far away, the upheaved boulders, tossed and scattered up the hillside, look to a city that was builded with narrow lanes and houses pressing downwards to the sea. One can almost trace the fretted lines of chimneys, almost see the rising coils of smoke. Rusty lichens spot the granite rocks with scarlet smudges, masses of crumbled earth upsurge amid them. Yonder is one that is grey and barren, towering like a monument. Besides it is another, golden on top and curved like a dome by some forgotten architect. There is another deep brown and squat, like the church of some dead sect. Through the fantastic play of sunlight and wind over their surfaces, maybe pulses and plays the life of some strange deity. The few last clouds remaining throw over them pathetic violet shadows shifting from time to time. Elsewhere there is nothing but glancing knives of sunlight, cutting through the rime, chipping, hacking, nicking, flickering, tapping at these barriers. The wind whirls the long dead grasses about them, like a million thin grey hands striving in vain to destroy the secret powers of the stone. They are blown this way and that. The sun is almost gone.

Gurgle, boom, surge: the sea no more is flat and blue. It rises, rises, rises, steadily eating its path-

way through. It is a shallow, cruel sea; crabs and scavenger-fish cling greedily to the granite slabs beneath, grinding in their mandibles the little fragments that it tears away in death. Now the sea falls, but to rise again. At each hissing expiration of its pain, the sun paints it with copper-yellow flame. It seems as if covered with little points of fire, running towards the hillside, which sweep still upwards and higher. Surge, boom, gurgle. It must fling 'mid topmost boulders one great frozen torch of silver ere the sun puts out its lamp and goes away.

Now the sun whirls its last fire lances against the glancing edges of granite. They stick and kindle and hang flapping. Here a polished, wind-smoothed face glows all over as if covered with rows of sheeted panes, that dangle in loose plates for the sun to tap his tune upon. Here a hulking shapeless mass, like a great grey frog, wears one blue-white diamond on his forehead. Now that other towering one, which seems to lean over a low damp-looking spot, circled with rows of topaz lanterns, is slowly going out. But over there that dull rakish looking row which stare and jostle each other like tenements in the slums; why, they fairly burn with light: they are more gay than any now!

Surge, boom, and gurgle: the sea swelters under a menacing glare of bronze. The ebb and flow of breakers races onwards without stint. Now the dying sky takes the hint: it, too, rekindles with unearthly light burning away the black-speckled curtains that ascend into the night. Is that the moon rising? Redder and redder the sky becomes: it flashes surprising; with rosy arcs it whistles and hums. What is that sound? It is the wind which is bellowing like maddened sirens; the sea that is clashing like jangled bells. The crimson fumes mount up and overswell the sky, drowning the stars in their menace, higher and higher! Fire! Fire! All the sky is afire!

The sky, ashen grey of smoke through which the choked light struggles slowly bringing out earth's hideous ugliness; the water one grey messy sheet of ice; the earth dull grey of trampled snows, colourless, sullen. The trees stark masses of black ragged pines, shrieking, whispering with the wind that bends and lashes their lines. Darkness on the trees, stark and brooding; darkness, total darkness on the earth.

March 4, 1915.

## NEW ENGLAND WINTER

Red-brown earth, Indian earth,  
Scorched earth, yet frozen earth,  
Earth everywhere deliciously sombre,  
Beneath the snow-blue afternoon:  
Stern earth, secret earth,  
Rock strewn hillside and gurgling stream,  
You hold some mystery of the past,  
Which you can never explain — which no one has  
taught you to speak.

Earth for roamers, earth for hunters, earth desolate  
and free as any ocean,  
Rolling crest and swampy hollow, earth unshaped  
by any tradition;  
Half-finished earth, useless earth, where are your  
scoundrels, saints and lovers?  
The boulders grin and the east wind shakes dog-  
gedly the black pines.

Earth everywhere rejecting life — sparse graveyards  
and sparse forests —

Mournful meadows and white birches that quiver  
ghostily —

The marsh breaking away to seaward in long flat  
mournful circles,

The tide-rock lifting its forehead in the distance  
sullenly:

Earth that should have been left a wilderness —  
earth not meant for habitation,

Sordid, grasping, evil earth, your robes have dropt  
from you;

Naked you lie, hard sinews out of the snow half  
peeping:

And only the warmth of a land you scorn could ever  
your life renew.

1914.

## THE EMPTY HOUSE

Out from my window-sill I lean  
And see a straight, four-storied row  
Of houses.

Once long ago  
These had their glory; they were built  
In the fair palmy days before  
The Civil War when all the seas  
Saw the white sails of Yankee ships  
Scurrying home with spice and gold.  
And many of these houses hung  
Proud wisps of crape upon their doors  
On learning that a son had died  
At Chancellorsville or Fredericksburg,  
Their offering to the Union side.

But man's forever drifting will  
Again took hold of him; again,  
Before some plastering had dried,  
Society packed up, moved away.  
Now, would you look upon these houses,



You would not think they ever had a prime,  
A grim four-storied serried row  
Of rooms to let; at any time  
Tenants are moving in or out:  
Families drifting down or struggling still  
To keep their heads up and not down.  
A tragic busy pettiness  
Has settled on them all  
But one.  
And in that one, when I came here,  
A family lived, but with its trunks packed up,  
And now that family's gone.

Its shutterless, blindless windows let you look inside  
And see the sunlight checkering the bare floor  
With patterns from the window frames  
All day;  
Its backyard neatly swept  
Contains no crammed ash-barrels and no lines  
For clothes to flap about on;  
It does not look by day as if it had  
Ever a living soul beneath its roof.  
It marks a gap in the grim line,  
No house at all, but an untenanted shell.

But when the windows up and down those fronts  
With yellow glimmer of gas blaze forth,  
I know it is the only house that lives  
In all that long four-storied row.  
The others are mere shelves, layer on layer,  
Of warring, separate personalities;  
A jangle and a tangle of emotions,  
Without a single meaning running through them.  
But it, the empty house, has mastered all its secrets;  
Eyelessly proud,  
It watches, it is master;  
It sees the other houses still incessantly learning  
The secret it remembers,  
And which it can repeat the last dim syllable of.

October, 1915.

## CLIPPER-SHIPS

Beautiful as a tiered cloud, skysails set and shrouds twanging, she emerges from the surges that keep running away before day on the low Pacific shore. With the roar of the wind blowing half a gale after, she heels and lunges, and buries her bows in the smother, lifting them swiftly, and scattering the glistening spray-drops from her jib-sails with laughter. Her spars are cracking, her royals are half splitting, her lower stunsail booms are bent aside, like bowstrings ready to loose, and the water is roaring into her scuppers, but she still staggers out under a full press of sail, her upper trucks enkindled by the sun into shafts of rosy flame.

Oh, the anchor is up and the sails they are set, and it's 'way Rio; 'round Cape Stiff and up to Boston, ninety days hauling at the ropes: the decks slope and the stays creak as she lurches into it, sending her jib awash at every thrust, and a handful of dust and a thirst to make you weep, are all we get for being two years away to sea.

Topgallant stunsail has carried away! Ease the spanker! The anchor is rusted on the deck. Men in short duck trousers, wide-brimmed straw hats, with brown mahogany faces, pace up and down, spinning the wornout yarns they told a year ago. Some are coiling rope; some smoke; "Chips" is picking oakum near the boats. Ten thousand miles away lies their last port. In the rigging climbs a hairy monkey, and a green parakeet screams at the masthead. In the dead calm of a boiling noonday near the line, she lifts her spread of shining canvas from heel to truck, from jib o' jib to ringtail, from moonsails to watersails. Men have hung their washing in the stays so she can get more way on her. She ghosts along before an imperceptible breeze, the sails hanging limp in the cross-trees, and clashing against the masts. She is a proud white albatross skimming across the ocean, beautiful as a tiered cloud. Oh, a Yankee ship comes down the river; blow, boys, blow: her masts and yards they shine like silver: blow, my bully boys, blow: she's a crack ship, a dandy clipper, nine hundred miles from land; she's a down-Easter from Massachusetts, and she's bound to the Rio Grande!

Where are the men who put to sea in her on her first voyage? Some have piled their bones in Cali-

fornia among the hides; some died frozen off the Horn in snowstorms; some slipped down between two greybacks, when the yards were joggled suddenly. Still she glistens beautifully, her decks snow-white with constant scrubbing as she sweeps into some empty sailless bay which sleeps all day, where the wild deer skip away when she fires her eighteen pounder, the sound reverberating about the empty hills. San Francisco? No: San Francisco will not be built for a dozen years to come. Meanwhile she hums with the tumult of loading. The mutineers, even, are let out of their irons and flogged and fed. Every day from when the dawn flares up red amid the hills to the hour it drops dead to westward, men walk gawkily, balancing on their heads the burden of heavy, stiff hides. Now the anchor is up and the sails they are set and its 'way, Rio. Boston girls are pulling at the ropes: only three months of trouble yet: time for us to go!

Beautiful as a tiered cloud she flies out seaward, and on her decks loaf and stumble a luckless crowd; the filthy sweepings of the stews. In a week, in a day, they have spent a year's wages, swilling it away and letting the waste of it run down among the gutters. How were these deadbeats bribed to go? Only the Ann Street runners know. Dagos,

Dutchmen, Souwegians, niggers, crimp-captured greenhorns, they loaf up on the after deck, some of them already wrecks, so sick they wish they had never been born. Before them all the "old man" calls for a bucket of salt water to wash off his shore face. While he is at it, telling them how he will haze them till they are dead if they try soldiering, but it will be good grub and easy work if they hand, reef and steer and heave the lead, his officers are below, rummaging through the men's dunnage, pulling out heavers, pricklers, rum bottles, sheath knives, and pistols. On each grizzled half-cowed face appears something between a sheepish grin, a smirk of fear, a threat of treachery, and the dogged resignation of a brute. But the mate — Bucko Dougles is his name — is the very same that booted three men off the masthead when they were shortening sail in the teeth of a Cape Horn snorter. Two of them fell into the sea, and the third was tossed still groaning into the water. Only last night the captain stuck his cigar butt into one poor swabber's face for not minding the compass, and gave Jim Baines a taste of ratline hash for coming up on deck with dirty hands. Meanwhile under a grand spread of canvas, one hundred feet from side to side, the ship rides up the parallels. From aloft

through the blue stillness of a tropic night, crammed with stars, with thunder brewing in the horizon, a mournful echo rises and swells:

Oh, my name is hanging Johnny,  
Hooray, hooray!  
Oh, my name is hanging Johnny,  
So hang, boys, hang.

The *Great Republic*, launched before thirty thousand people, her main truck overlooking the highest steeple of the town, the eagle at her bows, and colours flying, now in her first and last port, is slowly dying. She is a charred hulk, with toppling masts, seared gilding, and blistered sides. The *Alert* no more slides pertly through the bergs of the Horn. The desolate barrens of Staten Land, where no man was ever born, hold her bones. The Black Baller *Lightning*, that took eighty thousand dollars' worth of cargo around the world in one quick trip, was hurled and ripped to pieces on some unchartered reef or other. The *Dreadnought* disappeared in a hurricane's smother of foam. The *Sovereign of the Seas*, that never furled her top-sails for ten years, was sheared clean amidships by the bows of an iron steamer as she left her last port. The slaver, *Bald Eagle*, cut an unlucky career short

when she parted with her anchor and piled up on the Paracels where the pirate junks are waiting for every ship that swells out over the horizon. The *Antelope* was caught off the Grande Ladrone in the northeast monsoon; she's gone. The *Flying Cloud*, proud as she was of beating every ship that carried the Stars and Stripes or the St. George's flag, could not race faster than a thunder-bolt that fell one day on her deck and turned her to a cloud of flame — everything burned away but her fame! No more will California hear the little *Pilgrim's* parting cheer. The crew took to an open boat when their ship was scuttled by a privateer. So they die out, year after year.

Sometimes the lookout on a great steamer wallowing and threshing through the heavy seas by night, sees far off on his lee quarter something like a lofty swinging light. Beautiful as a tiered cloud, a ghostly clipper-ship emerges from the surges that keep running away before day on the the low Pacific shore. Her upper works are enkindled by the sun into shafts of rosy flame. Swimming like a duck, steering like a fish, easy yet dry, lively yet stiff, she lifts cloud on cloud of crowded stainless sail. She creeps abeam, within hail, she dips, she chases, she outpaces like a mettlesome racer the



lumbering tea-kettle that keeps her company. Before she fades into the weather quarter, the lookout cries: "Holy Jiggers, are you the *Flying Dutchman*, that you go two knots to our one?" Hoarsely comes back this answer from the sail: "*Challenge* is our name: America our nation: Bully Waterman our master: we can beat Creation."

And it's 'way, Rio;  
Way — hay — hay, Rio;  
O, fare you well, my pretty young girl,  
For we're bound to the Rio Grande.

March, 1915.

## LAKE SHORE AT NIGHT

At the edge of a beautiful gulf of gloom and  
stillness,

The city rises:

Glittering with thousands of spangles  
Seen between the dull smoke of the trains  
That leap out shoreward,  
Or bump empty freight-cars into each other,  
With a noise like surf collapsing.

One or two lights low down  
Seemingly blurred by mist,  
The grey outline of dunes beyond,  
And watery stars.

For the wind is bringing rain  
To stream down the spangled house-fronts,  
To make the lights of the city run together,  
Growing more dim.

At the edge of a beautiful gulf of gloom and stillness  
The city rises:

And behind her painted mask  
She frowns a little, growing more weary,  
Yet shedding abroad to the night  
The glow of a thousand spangles,  
Her glory, where winds will whirl it  
Through dry blades of grass on the dunes.

February, 1915.

## THE BUILDING OF CHICAGO

Out of the land of limitless snows the north wind arose and gathered up his thin black arrows. The red wind, the tuneless wind, started his long easy lope down the unsloping plains of the Land of Little Sticks. From the swamp, from the lake, he blew aloft in the sky clouds of flapping black geese. Shrieking and whimpering, like rabbits caught by the lynx, the plains reeled away beneath him, frayed ribbons of tape. He danced and shot and swirled and dived amid pale waters flashing far away to the horizon. He curled and twisted and hissed like a running snake amid the clamour of geese and the low, mournful howling of wolves that ran over the snow after his foot-tracks.

Muttering and shaking his heavy head, matted and shaggy with sleep of the dead, the west wind began to creep out of the rust-stained crags that fell shattered to the base of the canyon. He yawned and growled horribly, and from his hot breath the rocks dissolved as if a giant fist had smitten them. In the twisted crannies the sound reverberated with

the low dull echo of muddy torrents. Mournfully and heavily it rumbled off, pushing the clouds before it, shuffling and scrambling eastward with sullen explosions of pent ire and spitted fire of forked lightning. Gloomily it lowered over the rolling breadth of the prairie, smashing the flowers, and uprooting the grasses with its long claws of rain.

The south wind whimpered as she sidled up the great swaying bend of the river. Interwoven greenery entangled her feet. Her eyes were sorrowful and she scattered dull white flowers. She loved the full brown body of the fat river rolling its mud through the forest. He would not heed her, as he ate away at his banks every day, or swirled in oily bubbles away to hide in some low bayou, playing soft pipes with reeds that rustled amid down-swaying mosses from motionless cypress trees. The south wind sought the river at his source, and when his course grew more rapid through the rolling green bluffs she fell pensive and silent. She crept, she straggled, lispig, whispering: "Is he there?"

The east wind snorted and chuckled in rude strangling gasps as he came down from the mountains. He was as blue as a fish, for he had seen the sea, and at his coming the gnarled black oak trees crackled and rattled with gusts of sardonic

laughter, spilling brown torrents of leaves. They bent, they broke, and he jeered at them. Now and then he paused to splash with snow some sullen council of smoky blue pines, or to shatter the rocks with axes of ice. He flickered, he relapsed, he re-whirled the silent snow drift that the north wind had fashioned and then trailed over it his streaming robes, making it run away in oily trickles of rosy ooze to the river. He laughed, he advanced, and at each turning of the hills he changed his mind.

Now the winds unite together, and they dance and change the weather on a low, sandy barren of the plains. To the north frozen waters; to the east, rainy forests; to the south, lowland valleys; to the west, gusty plains. They change hands and weave their figures, and not a single one lingers, as they veer through the queer varied year. Sometimes it is the north wind that carries the sad crying south wind to his lakes and tundras to swelter awhile under a soft blue sky half shrouded in a haze canopy. Then, like black arrows, swarms of flies and gnats arise from the shallows and sting her to death. Sometimes the east and west wind fight all day with delight. They are red marks on the blue body of the east wind, and drops glare on the grey shaggy cloak of that old bear, the west.

Sometimes north and south, and east and west chase each other like sister and brother. But they never rest or tire in the least, but with many a kiss or blow on the mouth they hurry forthright nor slacken their race.

Behold, what the winds have created; a whole world's meeting place! Black towers, like bastions of iron, break the wrinkles of the lake, stop the roll of the silent green prairie, turn back the crackling dense grown forests, arrest the meandering river. Men of the north, huge, blond and drunken, come to roll and stroll and sleep and sit brooding long in melancholy defect. Men of the east shiftily sidle amid them, polite and smiling, uneasily twisting, or vague and impassive, lost in some inhuman dream of peace. Men of the south, felinely graceful, saunter with sombreros stuck on the backs of their heads, a flower or a dagger in their fingers, a flower or a cigarette at their lips. Men of the west, hulking, flamboyant, generous, cruel, reckless, ride whizzing up the streets, their faces hacked by the wind to the resemblance of an Indian's. Through blood, through mire, through dust, through heat, through lust, through fire, through defeat, through treachery, they strive, and tear, and struggle, like loosed wild beasts, and their pantings are the white

hissing bursts of steam from the freight locomotives that crash through the city bringing more weight of life to aid them. But the gloomy arched bastions stand forever, gazing out at the sad wastes of plain and water, bearing the affront of the winds that hoot and shoot and howl past them; the north wind trolling his skoal to his dead vikings; the east wind nasally yelping and whining for his fallen; the south wind mouthing and blubbering over her lover; the west wind roaring like a giant bear that is brought to bay in its lair, and turns at last on its hunters, preparing for its death onset after the fire has attacked its cavern and the high trees have fallen on the trail.

December, 1914.



## DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI EMBARKATION

### I

Dull masses of dense green,  
The forests range their sombre platforms;  
Between them silently, like a spirit,  
The river finds its own mysterious path.

Loosely the river sways out, backward, forward,  
Always fretting the outer side;  
Shunning the invisible focus of each crescent,  
Seeking to spread into shining loops over fields.

Like an enormous serpent, dilating, uncoiling,  
Displaying a broad scaly back of earth-smeared gold;  
Swaying out sinuously between the dull motionless  
forests,  
As molten metal might glide down the lip of a vase  
of dark bronze;

It goes, while the steamboat drifting out upon it,  
Seems now to be floating not only outwards but  
upwards;

In the flight of a petal detached and gradually mov-  
ing skyward

Above the pink explosion of the calyx of the dawn.

## II

### HEAT

As if the sun had trodden down the sky,  
Until no more it holds living air, but only humid  
vapour,

Heat pressing upon earth with irresistible langour,  
Turns all the solid forest into half-liquid smudge.

The heavy clouds like cargo-boats strain slowly  
against its current;

And the flickering of the haze is like the thunder  
of ten thousand paddles

Against the heavy wall of the horizon, pale-blue  
and utterly windless,

Whereon the sun hangs motionless, a brassy disc  
of flame.

### III

#### FULL MOON

Flinging its arc of silver bubbles, quickly shifts the  
moon

From side to side of us as we go down its path ;  
I sit on the deck at midnight and watch it slipping  
and sliding,

Under my tilted chair, like a thin film of spilt water.

It is weaving a river of light to take the place of  
this river ;

A river where we shall drift all night, then come to  
rest in its shallows ;

And then I shall wake from my drowsiness and  
look down from some dim treetop

Over white lakes of cotton, like moonfields on every  
side.

#### IV

### THE MOON'S ORCHESTRA

When the moon lights up  
Its dull red campfire through the trees;  
And floats out, like a white balloon,  
Into the blue cup of the night, borne by a casual  
breeze;

The moon-orchestra then begins to stir.  
Jiggle of fiddles commence their crazy dance in the  
darkness.

Crickets churr  
Against the stark reiteration of the rusty flutes  
which frogs

Puff at from rotted logs  
In the swamp.

And then the moon begins her dance of frozen pomp  
Over the lightly quivering floor of the flat and  
mournful river.

Her white feet slightly twist and swirl.

She is a mad girl

In an old unlit ball room

Whose walls, half-guessed at through the gloom,  
Are hung with the rusty crape of stark black cypress  
Which show, through gaps and tatters, red stains  
half hidden away.

V

THE STEVEDORES

Frieze of warm bronze that glides with catlike  
movements

Over the gangplank poised and yet awaiting,  
The sinewy thudding rhythm of forty shuffling feet  
Falling like muffled drumbeats on the stillness.

O roll the cotton down,  
Roll, roll the cotton down,  
From the further side of Jordan,  
O roll the cotton down!

And the river waits,  
The river listens,  
Chuckling little banjo-notes that break with a flop  
on the stillness;  
And by the low dark shed that holds the heavy  
freights,  
Two lonely cypress trees stand up and point with  
stiffened fingers  
Far southward where a single chimney stands out  
aloof in the sky.

## VI

### NIGHT LANDING

After the whistle's roar has bellowed and shuddered,  
Shaking the sleeping town and the somnolent river,  
The deep toned floating of the pilot's bell  
Suddenly warns the engines.

They stop like heart-beats that abruptly stop,  
The shore glides to us, in a wide low curve.

And then — supreme revelation of the river —  
The tackle is loosed — the long gangplank swings  
outwards —  
And poised at the end of it, half-naked beneath the  
searchlight,  
A blue-black negro with gleaming teeth waits for  
his chance to leap.



## VII

### THE SILENCE

There is a silence I carry about with me always;  
A silence perpetual, for it is self-created;  
A silence of heat, of water, of unchecked fruitfulness  
Through which each year the heavy harvests bloom,  
and burst and fall.

Deep, matted green silence of my South,  
Often within the push and scorn of great cities,  
I have seen that mile-wide waste of water swaying  
out to you,  
And on its current glimmering, I am going to the  
sea.

There is a silence I have achieved: I have walked  
beyond its threshold;  
I know it is without horizons, boundless, fathomless,  
perfect.  
And some day maybe, far away,  
I will curl up in it at last and sleep an endless sleep.

Aug. 20-27, 1915.

## THE OLD SOUTH

High streaks of cottony-white cloud fill the sky. The sun slips out of the swamp swinging his heavy-jewelled mace before his face as he plays with the ripples that gurgle under the rotting cypress-knees. The breeze lifts the Spanish moss an instant and then is still. The sun tosses dew over the ragged palmetto-leaves. Aslant on a gush of warm breeze from the broiling savannah, the song of a mocking-bird floats, a fierce scurry of notes, through the air. The sun seems to be kindling a flare at every point of the horizon. Grasshoppers, crickets, cicadas, everything that flits or skims, tunes and trills its shrill violin. Butterflies flutter, broken motes of colour; hummingbird and dragon-fly dart green streaks through the quivering sky.

The river rolls, boiling and frothing through the lowlands. It is weary of the dull stiff mudbanks that flake away before it in sticky chips; weary of the turbid masses of mud that it must scour away to make its path down to the sea. It gulps and seethes horribly with hungry angry lips, fretting

first one bank, then another, as it goes sliding and flopping down the long twisted bends in the fierce glare of morning, deceived no longer at each marsh-outlet and creek and bayou-mouth into thinking that here and not further south must be the clear blue water it seeks, where its heavy burden may fall in peace. The river goes slapping, lapping, rustling the canes of the brake and the motionless cypress-trees. A mocking-bird's song floats down before it in the breeze.

It is noon and the carnival, king of fools, rules the city. A beautiful woman, her face cold, haughty, expressionless, the fire in her eyes half hidden, goes dancing down the street with a man whose shape is like an ape. Her feet stir the dust and it glitters as it settles in streams over her shoulders, like slipping confetti-showers. She is a flower over-weary of the sun. Her perfume is almost gone, and the fever will soon snap her from her stalk and toss her into the tomb. Bass drums toll to her tripping movement. Her skirts sway. Amid their flickering spangles plays a satyr, grinning at the multitude. He tears off her frills and flings them into the gutter choked with filth. Her half-naked form writhes and recoils like a tree before the storm.

The river frowns and lours for a heavy, fuming, dull blue shower races gloomily above it from the northward. As it goes it throws out at the trees tentacles of curled coppery lightning that enlace and line the branches and send them crashing downwards with full powdery explosions of muffled thunder. The river lashes itself into fits, smashing the bank with maddened fists, as it spins the quivering steamer around and nearly sends it reeling aground. It growls, it howls, it shouts its terror of the forest whose broken logs topple into it with a great splash, swirling and whirling, sucked and crashing in sudden black somersaults, while the storm roars and grumbles away with spattered hail-bullets and noise of affray. Now the forest groans and drips and shrieks with rain that whistles through its branches. Every trickle, every pool, every creek is full. The choked-up torrent overflows and covers miles on miles of furrows and woods with endless glaring wastes of water. A gaunt pine falls with a sigh and a splash.

Slowly the river resumes its patient march through the lowlands. Now autumn comes, and afternoon seems throwing grey filaments of haze from tree to tree. The old plantation sleeps, for it has nothing else to do. Live-oaks are bowered

about it, drooping heavily, weary of holding up lusty green leaves from year to year. In graves under the live oaks many are sleeping. They have slipped from the dream of life to the dream of death. Perhaps they died for a woman's sake, for a sigh, a chance word, a look, a letter, for nothing, or for a song that men sing. What matter? Life is a dream; to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, it is the same. Along old floors underneath mouldering doors blow light gusts of wind stirring the dust. A mouse cheeps in a corner. Old age creeps upon us, and life is grey. The old plantation moulders, day on day. Soon there will be gaps in the floors and the doors will swing open to all. Let us doze on the levee and feel the breeze as it slips down the river running past us.

The river runs very fast, for it is bearing sodden logs, like broken lives. The sleepy vultures line the grey cottonwoods that tower above its banks. To them, too, life is a dream. This morning they tore the rank carrion of a dead horse that floated down to them. Death does not matter, for life is defeat, but it is very sweet to have plenty to eat and to sleep in the sunlight. Sleeping and waking and sleeping again, that is how one learns to live without pain. Let autumn throw thin filaments

of regret from tree to tree. Leaves may drop slowly, but the live oak which drops not its leaves at all is the tree that is planted on graves.

Immortal death is very sweet  
When brown leaves fill the dripping gap  
Of a broken vault, and the frightened feet  
Of mice pit-patter, and owls flap  
Out to the cool moonshiny night,  
Which scatters crushed jewels down the river;  
While trees, dumb-stricken ghosts in flight,  
Chatter and shake against each other.

Tinkle — tinkle — drop; the rain that filters through the leaky roof. Under the colonnade where slaves were sold and bars chinked with gold runs a tiny stream of water through the dust. Was that a door slamming or only a torn hanging that flapped? Who knows? Perhaps it was two ghosts who chattered together through agued lips and rattling teeth? Not a dusty bottle in the bar. Marks of muddy boots on the smashed marble. Wind that laughs insanely up the spiral stairways, down the floorless corridors. Let us go, for rain is dropping and the roof is leaking, and I seem to hear a grey frog hopping while yonder door is

creaking as if someone were locked behind it and were whispering to get out. Let us go, for the ceiling sags and will soon be falling, and a black spider is crawling past my face, and rags are drifting about on the floor. Let us go, for a crazy deaf woman with a bent stick, threatens us in quavering voice, declaring she will strike us for daring to enter her palace. Let us go and not come back any more. The dead are best dead and forgotten.

The river rolls through fields blossoming with cotton day after day. In a crazy cabin someone is crooning a song. The sun lifts his long jewelled mace an instant, in careless lazy fingers, before his face and lets it slip away again. Aslant on a chill scurry of rain floats a mocking-bird's jangled song. It dies away and leaves only silence, half-enclosing the monotonous drone of a sad hymn of despair which a sleepy negro is humming to himself from nowhere.

January, 1915.

## THE GREAT RIVER

### I

Out of a bank of blue-black clouds to northward,  
Winding between two high red bluffs, a river  
Spreads out, a mile across from bank to bank,  
Its sheet of moving water.

It has been here when into silent forests  
The Indians came and lit their council-fires,  
And sought new hunting-grounds and sharpened  
arrows,  
Or gathered on these high red bluffs to pray;

It flowed on still when the first French explorers,  
Marquette the priest and Joliet the bold,  
Paddled upon it down from spring to winter;  
Seeking its mouth in the Vermilion Sea;

It stood at flood-tide while the northern armies  
Battered with shell the brown clay bluffs of Vicks-  
burg.



It will flow still when the last white man, lonely,  
Gazes upon its shrunken altered depths.

It goes, it flows,  
Mile-wide, continually curving, steady, silent.  
Taking the yellow-brown streams of east and west  
Forever in its splendid onward march.

. . . . .

Thunder has worked upon these cliffs,  
Thunder has carved these tall red sandstone pillars,  
Has split the solid rock,  
Has made the river follow where it will.

Low Indian drums of thunder,  
And the howling of winds in the autumn,  
Have bowed and broken the forest  
Time after time;

And yet, child of the woods,  
The river goes, carrying away to southward,  
Where far away the blue Gulf will receive it,  
Its burden of brown earth.

It rises out of thunder,  
It sweeps the prairie headlands rolling eastward,

The Missouri whirls into it its treacherous brown  
current,

Afar it glides, and then it sinks to earth.

. . . . .

Here where men's dreams  
Of empire rotted, washed away,  
I lie at ease upon the bank  
And watch the chips, and logs and bits of grass  
Go southward, fast descending.

Here where De Soto's heart  
Broke, when he found his westward pathway  
barred;

Here where La Salle planted a lillied flag,  
And dreamed his great dream, levelled soon to dust:

Here where my fathers crossed,  
Broad-shouldered Tennesseans bearing in them the  
fibre

To carve out new farms from the valleys westward,  
I lie at ease and question my sad heart.

Has the land failed,  
Or will it rise some day to fresh endeavor?  
Though I, the last one of my name and race,  
Be lost across the seas?

Still flows the shining river  
And in its flowing, thus it speaks to me ;  
“ Endure, and in your constant daily striving,  
Carve out somewhere the stuff of new-made king-  
doms,  
Though no man heeds them, though hopes turn to  
dust.”

. . . . .  
Lift a last council-fire  
Upon this ragged bluff  
Two hundred feet aloft,  
Rising above the great bends to the southward.

Lift a plumed long grey smoke,  
And summon everywhere men's hearts to solemn  
council.

Lift a last council-fire,  
And let us speak at last.

We who are broken, lost,  
Still carry in our hearts some dream of finer fibre,  
Still clearly shape some vision of new flame,  
To mock this sordid and slave-ridden earth.

And we will gather  
When the great council calls us in the autumn,

To seek out once again some far-off kingdom  
Unconquered yet, yet never wholly lost.

## II

With flashes of lightning striding above its surface,  
From the great white sagging masses of cloud that  
    go to eastward,  
When the earth holds its breath from a day of  
    windless heat,  
So as I saw it once, I see the river now.

A vast brown rounded sweep of moving water,  
Quitting the red prairie slopes for the bottom lands  
    to southward;  
Crumbling the clay face of the bank, creating  
    lagoons and islands,  
Where the lone white heron plumes herself amid  
    down-sagging vines.

. . . . .  
Slowly the summer wanes, and slowly slackens the  
    river;  
Logs that were piled up in spring roost on the  
    sandbars at autumn,

Fever has passed through the land, the leaf turns  
yellow,  
Slowly the seasons pass ;

And there beyond the weedy green levee,  
Sweeping in curve on curve against the tangled  
frieze of forest,  
The river goes, when haze wraps up the twilight,  
Towards the land of ghosts:

Buffaloes, snorting, trample their way to its  
shallows ;  
Flocks of wild pigeon darken the skies at sunset ;  
Tangle of matted vines cast into it red berries,  
Forests long gone writhe still gaunt branches at the  
sky.

And, underneath the bluff,  
Where the banks are eaten away,  
Trees one by one drop slowly into its current,  
Each one a tilt, a reeling collapse, a fall.

Darker and still more dark  
The years become ;

Tightening the horizon nightly, cities rise,  
Their smoke is laced together by banks and bridges  
of steel.

But still the river flows,  
And still it bears away with it  
Flowers and leaves and trees, the years, the hours,  
the seasons,  
Towards the grey sea of the ghosts to southward.

. . . . .  
I saw in midwinter the white mists arising,  
From your surface still shining, still moving steadily  
on.

I saw in midwinter the wild duck at daybreak  
Emerge from your reeds;

I saw in midwinter the plumes of the cypress  
Like smoke of campfires lost, still black in the  
daybreak.

The sweetgum dropped its final scarlet star: —  
From sleepless night I rose and faced the dawn.

. . . . .  
String after string of bubbles and of foam,  
The years go on, and we who go with them  
Are driftwood, floating weeds,  
Borne outwards whither?

Can we not wait,  
Have we no force to bear  
This great dull stretch of earth and water mingled  
Until there rise for us the floods of spring?

Until there come to us  
The great release, the surging melting waters,  
That send us speeding to our goal  
With doubly-hurrying feet?

Have we no power to find  
Space beyond space of shining perfect freedom,  
Sweeping us on beyond flat reefs of failure,  
Quickened and shining, to the perfect light?

### III

Full moon at midnight,  
Flinging across the river your scarf of filmy silver,  
Making the eddies dance beneath your feet,  
Bring to me my loved one in the night!

Katydid, cricket,  
Bullfrog and treefrog piping in loud chorus,  
Whip-poor-will and baying hound,  
Bring to me my loved one in the night!

Owl that in the branches  
Screeches loud, then in the hush  
Hoots softly to the solemn moon,  
Bring to me my loved one in the night!

Night of the passionate south,  
Crush all the river under your big kisses,  
Make her to sink beneath the mad embrace  
Of the white blazing moon!

. . . . .  
Where is the wind tonight?  
The moon glides across the river,  
That glitters emptily beneath it  
Eddy on eddy, mile on mile of light.

I have cried out to the forest,  
And not a leaf answered me;  
I have spoken in vain to the long-leaved feathery  
    pine-trees,  
Where is the wind tonight?

Steadily out of the gulf  
He comes, the lover from the darkness;  
Rocking the branches,  
Breaking in ripple on ripple the moonpath up to  
    southward.



Come, rushing breeze of the darkness, scented with  
earth and her flowers,  
Blot out quickly for me that low hung orange star,  
Send frightened clouds scurrying suddenly  
Over the face of the moon!

. . . . .  
On the verandah rings the fiddle,  
'Twixt the columns feet are glancing,  
Couples glide and sway and turn  
Under the candles tall and white.

Spice-bush odours from the garden  
Drift between their rounded movements;  
Swishing skirts and flashing smiles  
Twirl and vanish to the shadows.

Fireflies signal here and there;  
On the lawn the honey-locust  
Lifts white pinnacles to the moonlight,  
And the bee-tree shuts her flowers.

When the dawn will rise and smite  
To white calm, the six great columns,  
Night will be a crushed rose, fading,  
And the memory of a kiss.

. . . . .

A steamboat steadily weaves  
From point to point in darkness;  
Churning up the moonlight in between  
To 'bubbles and streaks of foam.

Into the shadowy banks where racing flows the  
current,  
And out again across the glittering shallows,  
Dotted with bubbling eddies where the sand-shoal  
breaks away  
It weaves its steady path;

The steamboat glows and burns,  
Shooting out billowy smoke and sparks from her  
tall funnels:  
In the glare of her deck-furnaces  
Bronze crouching shapes are seen;

And weaving across, she suddenly toots one long  
blast;  
Heavily it reverberates across the sleeping river.  
For she has seen two miles across the moonpath,  
The low lights of a landing town to southward.

## IV

No longer free, but parcelled out and shred,  
Amid swamp and bayou, chute, lagoon and cane-  
brake,

No longer wide, a slackened swirling river  
Above its clay-filled banks goes dragging past.

No longer free, but fettered in its movement,  
No longer wild, but bordered to the hem  
With fields of sugar, fields of rice, the smooth green  
leaves of cotton,  
It finds in slackening curves its weary way;

Too wild it was ever to reach the sea;  
Too vast it was to build a single outlet.  
It is lost in grey morasses  
Where rise the cypress-trees;

The sweetbay with its berries of bright red,  
The towering long leafed pine receives its waters.  
It came from forests and it goes to forests;  
Scarce half its waters find their goal at last.

. . . . .  
We have not loved enough,  
Nothing has taught our hearts to love and suffer,

Ere our desires were shaped  
We shunned the patient earth.

We builded long ago  
White houses with tall columns, splashed in shadows.  
The spider weaves her web amid their splendours,  
The mice creep heedless over their gaping floors.

Now we build factories  
For the pleasures that too soon  
Will turn to bitterness upon our lips.  
We build them, till the air is grimed with dust;

And far away their fires  
Die in the tragic dawn of some tomorrow  
Which we will find too early or too late,  
Which we had better pray not come at all.

. . . . .

River that goes to death,  
Deep mournful sluggish river,  
Draping in crape of Spanish moss  
Your weedy green bayous;

You hide yourself in haze;  
The wild duck from the canebrake rises crying,

The hummingbird hangs quivering in the heat,  
Through the long autumn, squirrels mount the  
trees;

The pawpaw falls at dusk;  
Nuts in the foliage gleam, ungathered yet.  
The fox-grape and the smilax coil together,  
The wax-white mistletoe mounts the highest  
boughs;

And all in vain you spread  
Lagoon beyond lagoon, low island after island.  
The sea will take you quietly at last,  
Whether you come there willingly or not.

. . . . .  
It winds out oceanward;  
The brown stain of the earth goes mile on mile  
unfading,  
White sandbars are piled high with bits of trees,  
The current ploughs great channels through the  
earth.

Afar off over shallows  
A lonely gull goes seeking for his kind.  
Green-brown, blue-green, the weedy smouldering  
sea  
Gnaws with its short sharp bursts upon the shore.

And far away to north  
Where the birch-forests glimmer by blue lakes,  
On high plateaus, where snow is late in dying,  
The shining river spreads anew its path.

Born of the forest and the cloud,  
It moves through a mile on mile of fertile valley;  
In deathless never-tiring strength it shapes  
All life within its bed, from birth to death.

July, 1920.

## GETTYSBURG

### I

Wild flowers bloom at Gettysburg;  
Violets in April line the hills;  
In May the dogwood shakes out starry branches,  
The trees put forth their young green daring leaves.

Wild flowers bloom at Gettysburg;  
Wild roses in fence-corners burst to bloom.  
Summer has come to Gettysburg,  
Summer has come at last.

The fields with rhododendron  
Pale-pink aflame on dark green branches are:—  
Solomon's seal and clover riot in pasturelands,  
In the lush grasses, brown grasshoppers churr.

Suddenly, out of the south,  
Sulphurous with grey coils of smoke,  
Thunder clouds rise menacing,  
Burst on the summer, sweep her riot away.

Seventy-three thousand men march out:  
For sixty miles the hills  
Along the dark valley of the Cumberland  
Glow with bright campfires to the startled night.

Stuart with his grey cavalry  
Ten thousand strong, sweeps east to Harrisburg;  
Meade, hurriedly summoned to command,  
With his blue files plods steadily, slowly northward.

## II

Wild flowers bloom at Gettysburg;  
Out of the darkness of the night two armies come  
together;  
As two great clouds, charged deep with summer  
rain,  
Might meet amid the hills.

In the long rolling country  
Covered with rounded spurs, divided by rich  
valleys,  
At early dawn the forces of the South  
Pour from the mountains downward to the plain.



The cavalry reel and crash:  
And now there opens wide the dawn of battle:—  
Under the July sun, just crawling up the sky,  
Grey puffs from batteries flash.

Backward the blue-clad army rolls from Gettysburg  
to southward,  
Till at the last they turn and hold in dense array,  
A tree-clad rocky height, a fish-hook spur bent  
backwards,  
With a low wall for breastwork: Cemetery Ridge.

The west burns up to red.  
The katydids and frogs begin their chorus.  
Soldiers light campfires, smoke and talk;  
One or two hold love-letters in their hands.

### III

Darkness and brooding clouds  
In the closed tent of Lee;  
And the cry of the South goes out  
For victory at last.

The cry of the South ascends:—  
A long great bodiless cry,

That now has come the hour by fate appointed,  
The moment to risk all.

Vicksburg holds still the river safe to south;  
But all the ports are rotting now and idle,  
And the flower of the Southern blood, drawn from  
the fields left fallow,  
Stands waiting underneath Lee's hand.

Lee prays in his tent at midnight:  
And in the White House, Abraham Lincoln prays.  
Each offering to some shaping force unseen,  
The terrible Cause they bear.

And in the silence of night  
The moon looks down on lines of troops advancing;  
Gleaming on file on file of bayonets,  
Lighting up line on line of grim, unshaven faces.

#### IV

Wild flowers bloom at Gettysburg,  
The dark Round Tops to south are thick with bushy  
sprays;

To north, Culp's Hill above its brook-filled valley  
Is gorgeous with new bloom:—

It is the second day; Lee hammers at the flanks.  
Longstreet, to south, swarms into Devil's Den.  
In the dense scrub men, panting, fling themselves;  
Fighting with granite boulders, hand to hand.

Tree-branches tossed and torn  
Flicker above a scene of screaming faces —  
Men clash and grapple with their naked hands —  
Or lie upon the ground with bloody lips.

And three miles to the north,  
Ewell, with Louisiana troops, launches a mad  
charge,  
Straight out from Gettysburg  
Up the stiff slopes and spurs of woodgrown grey  
Culp's Hill.

Cannon on cannon wakes,  
The brooding July heat  
Is rent by lurid flashes;  
Victory comes at last.

## V

Storms of the north and south,  
Rise in full strength on Gettysburg.  
Leap out, grey clouds, blue clouds,  
Rend this still heat away!

Winds of the west and east,  
Prepare yourselves, for once more wakes the battle,  
And in the brain of Lee  
Fierce hope exalts her sword.

Sunrise for the third time touches the peaks to  
westward,  
The hour has come, the day is here, the dial of  
time moves fast.

Facing each other a mile apart, the armies wait the  
onset.  
Between them rolls the valley with its trampled  
fields outspread.

From far away the thunders ride outstreaming;  
Muttering upon the horizon, they make their deadly  
way.

Gather, you masses of grey, for one last fierce up-  
springing,  
Waken, you guns of the South, and shape for them  
a passage.

Flash upon flash from brazen lips of flame —  
Two hundred cannon darken with smoke the fields.

The noon is past and now wanes afternoon  
Behind the grim line of their guns, Pickett's men  
wait their hour.

The thunder clouds have come together,  
A mile divides their crests; now the south breaks  
away!

Out of their rest they rise,  
Grey rank piled on grey rank,  
Hurtling up to the ridge  
Into the throats of the guns,  
Charging in stiff-held files  
Bent low to face their task,  
Leaping across the fields  
For a mile, into certain death.

Through ragged grey wisps of smoke they stumble,  
shift and waver,  
Between them the lightning flashes and the terrible  
peals of thunder  
Roar as the sky grows darker beneath the storm's  
great weight.  
In a leaden pall lit with lurid flashes, the armies  
come to death.

Bullets sing, flicking the dust to puffs of angry  
brown.  
Volley on volley crackles, amid them the cannon-  
flash  
Breaks and the line of the faces streams out from  
the sudden dark,  
Proud white ashen faces, bearing the Cross of the  
South.

Half of their way they have come, and still one third  
are standing  
Covered in blood they go onward, grey masses here  
and there.

And, along the stone-piled ridge,  
Under the throats of their guns,

The Northern troops, lying low,  
Wait with the bayonet.

Slashing with sabre and steel, they meet in melee  
and rally,  
Amid the clouds of smoke blown back by a sudden  
shift of wind.  
Under a gap in the wall, by a low hung clump of  
trees,  
They make the ground red with slaughter;  
Screams, yells, shots, oaths and groans fill the hot  
quivering air.

## VI

Wild flowers bloom at Gettysburg  
Between the young green wheat and the dense  
scrubby trees.  
Wounded men, writhing in their death-agony,  
Clutch at them in the grass.

Dying men stain their petals with bubbles and  
streaks of blood,  
The cause of the South is broken, the grey ranks  
melted away,

Barely one-quarter come staggering back from that  
charge,

The rest lie silent, face-downwards in the grass.

Darkness and heavy rain;  
And in the night  
The tramp of a beaten army  
Is heard upon the roads,  
Like a low dirge of doom.

Lee silently rides amid them.  
His head is bowed, his face looks haggard and  
drawn.

The flame of his hope reared high, now flickers out:  
And southward on that day brown Vicksburg falls.

Darkness and heavy rain  
And the dead men lying in darkness;  
The weight of a waning cause  
Drags Lee's soul down to earth.

## VII

Fifty and seven years ago:—  
And now their graves lie still,  
Covered with flowers every spring.  
Here in this country's heart.



But we who hold the land,  
Think of them only now by fits and starts: —  
We are too busy with new conquests every day,  
To think of those grey shapes that charged to death.

But sometimes, a tall shadow  
Gets between us and the sunlight;  
Sometimes we seem to hear  
A hoarse voice shouting behind us in command.

Sometimes a broken sword of cloud  
Suddenly puts out the light for us,  
Sometimes we seem to hear  
Dark thunders muttering, vague and far away.

July – August, 1920.

## THE PASSING OF THE SOUTH

On a catafalque, draped in black, under bronze cannon, forlorn and white, rigid in death, the corpse of the South is borne to its tomb. With muffled drums, with arms reversed, the veterans gather gaunt and grey, and their close-furled flags, 'neath the sun's pale flash, droop in weary folds to-day.

Eighteen hundred and sixty-one, and the sun shines gaily. The new levies of the North are swarming out from Washington, southwestward, to Bull Run. Listen to the drum as it rumble-bumbles through the woods, windless but cool, in the heat of July. Look at the clean blue uniforms, the epaulets, the brass buttons, the sashes with their thick gold braid. Let's go and picnic in the woods — who's afraid? "Our boys will shoot and the rebels will scoot, and day after to-morrow John Brown's body will be marching into Richmond. Then we'll hang Jeff Davies from a sour apple tree, as we go marching on." The sun flashes, but the leaves are silent. Suddenly the yell of a panther cuts the air, and from everywhere bursts out at once

grey smoke and the drumming roll of a volley. Little grey figures are stealing out of the woods. They rise and shoot, disappear into the undergrowth, rise and shoot again, near and more near. And still rises more menacing that long scream of a cheer and a red banner, with long blue bars, studded with stars, bursts out of the woods and flickers through the smoke upon the left. "Fire — fire —— for God's sake fire — what are you holding that gun for! Where — there — everywhere — the yell is on both sides of us — fire up in the air! Back — back — they are on our flank — make tracks for Washington — Father Abe is there — he will save us! Hoof-beats — cavalry — the cavalry are in pursuit — every man for himself — why don't they fall down when we shoot — May God curse that sun that glared in our faces — may the devil take this gun, it's too heavy to carry. Back — back — has any one thought of the flag — no, it's gone with the rest. Back — back to Washington!"

On a catafalque, draped in black, under bronze cannon, forlorn and white, rigid in death, the corpse of the South is borne to its tomb. With a low roll of drums and the dull tramp of feet, the procession starts, and it dribbles slowly down the long street, followed by sobs from broken hearts.

Eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and the new President of the Confederate States is present at a grand review of his army. From a fair knoll overlooking the scene, he sees afar the green fields, covered with long grey files of troops, a band of brothers assembled to defend the ascendant star of the South. Here are the cavalry of Virginia, men on blooded horses, which their orderlies have curried and groomed till they shine like silver. These are the men ready to ride for a jest into the cannon's mouth. Their sabres clink, and their horses curvet and prance and seem to curtsy as they dance in the sunlight. Here is the light artillery of Louisiana — the swamp-tigers, dark men, sitting erect on the caissons, rumbling at a gallop over the field. Here are the tall hunters from Tennessee and Arkansas, sallow, rangy men able to draw a bead on a squirrel's eye at thirty paces. Here comes, thundering and straining at the traces, the heavy artillery of South Carolina, the men who battered Fort Sumter to pieces. They are singing of Charleston girls and the dust rises and curls about their wheels. The whole earth quivers and reels, and the President bows and smiles. The grey files of hoarsely singing men, swinging at a rapid pace out of the dust, seem like endless phantoms, turning and returning again.

The President rides forward and the movement of the troops is stopped. "You are the seed-corn of the Confederacy," he says, "which we will plant in the North." A roar breaks forth and is blent with the baggage-wagons at the ends of the horizon. The whole army gives its assent.

On a catafalque, draped in black, under bronze cannon, forlorn and white, rigid in death, the corpse of the South is borne to its tomb. Boom! What was that? A far-off cannon. Boom! — they have reached the cemetery and the artillery is firing the last salute while the coffin draped in its single great flag is slowly lowered to the grave. The drooping banners, with their staffs shrouded in crape, are like great top-heavy flowers falling into the black hole in the ground. Boom! — old men used to battle hear that sound and they clutch with long bony hands their crutches, while the tears start. Boom! It is almost dark.

Eighteen hundred and sixty-three and Lee has a new plan. Grant is holding Vicksburg in a ring of fire and steel and the South is beginning to feel the pinch. The Mississippi is almost gone. Unless England comes soon to our help, we cannot fight on. Forward then, the South! In one last desperate effort, sweep up through Pennsylvania and

outflank the Capitol! Every night, men going to bed see afar the camp-fires of innumerable invading armies, like fireflies in the hills. Philadelphia fills with panic and the tramp of hastily drilling men. But on Seminary Ridge, before Gettysburg, Lee comes to a halt. There from Little Round Top to the Bloody Angle, stand the armies of Meade. Speak, guns! One hundred and twenty-five cannon fill the valley for three hours with swirling drifts of death. Now, then, Pickett, Longstreet, Heth! Forward — charge! Forward — charge! With bands playing and colours flying, dyeing the grass with their blood. “O, I’ll live and die for Dixie — Hooray — Hooray — I’ll live and die” — the wind bears the clamour away.

Dust that rises — dust that settles — and the rust of ancient years. . . .

On a catafalque draped in black, under bronze cannon, forlorn and white, rigid in death, the corpse of the South is borne to its tomb.

1916.

## THE GRAND CANYON OF THE COLORADO

### I

I have seen that which is mysterious,  
Aloof, divided, silent ;  
Something not of this earth.

Suddenly the endless dark green piney uplands  
Stopped.  
Yellow, red, grey-green, purple-black chasms fell  
swiftly below each other.

On the other side  
Strong-built, arose  
Towers whose durable terraces were hammered from  
red sandstone,  
Purple granite, and gold.

Beyond  
A golden wall.  
Aloof, inscrutable.

It was hidden  
Behind layers of white silence.  
No voice might reach it;  
It was not of this earth.

## II

When the free thunder-spirit  
Had built and carved these terraced walls,  
Completing his task of ages;  
He wrote upon them  
In dark invisible words,  
"It is finished."

Silent and windless,  
The forever completed  
Is never broken but by clouds.  
Sometimes dark eagles slow-sailing  
Rise out of it, like spirits,  
Wheeling away.

Now in the steady glare,  
Some will moves darkly,  
Driving the clouds, piling them,  
Shaping masses of shadow



That move slowly forward  
Over the array of towers.

Yet still behind them,  
Unscarred, unaltered,  
The work stands finished.  
Without a cry of protest, for protest is uncomple-  
tion,  
Moulded and fashioned forever in durable ageless  
stone,  
And on every surface is written  
In strong invisible words:  
"It is finished."

### III

Should I by chance deserve some last reward from  
earth,—  
The rewards of earth are usually unwholesome;—  
One single thing I would ask for,  
Burn my body here.

Kindle the pyre  
Upon this jutting point  
Dry aromatic juniper,

Lean flame, blue smoke,  
Ashes and dust.

The winds would drift the ash  
Outwards across the canyon;  
To the rose-purple rim of the desert  
Beyond the red-barred towers.

The rabbits in the morning  
Would come and snuff at the embers,  
While the chasm rekindling,  
Would build up its silent poem of colour to the sun.

#### IV

Shadows of clouds  
March across the canyon,  
Shadows of blue hands passing  
Over a curtain of flame.

Clutching, staggering, upstriking,  
Darting in blue-black fury,  
To where the pinnacles, green and orange,  
Await.

The winds are battling and striving to break them;  
Thin lightnings spit and flicker,  
The peaks seem a dance of scarlet demons  
Flitting amid the shadows.

Grey rain-curtains wave afar off  
Wisps of vapour curl and vanish:  
The sun throws soft shafts of golden light  
Over rose-buttressed palisades.

Now the clouds are a lazy procession:  
Blue balloons bobbing solemnly  
Over black-dappled walls:

Where rise sharp-fretted, golden-roofed cathedrals  
Exultantly, and split the sky with light.

August, 1915.

## ARIZONA POEMS

### I

#### THE WELL IN THE DESERT

By the well in the desert I sat for long,  
And watched the magpies, with black-and-white  
checkered bodies,

Leaping from twig to twig of the greasewood,  
To look at the water spilled on the ground  
By the herder who went by with three lean cattle,  
Climbing out of the blue-and-gold silence of morn-  
ing.

There was the shadow well with stones piled  
about it,

The coarse tattered rope, the battered tin bucket  
And the nose of my pony cropping thin grass not  
far off,

The grey sagebrush and silence.

At the horizon

The heat rose and fell,

Sharp flickering arpeggios;

The wind started somewhere,

Then stopped.  
The blue smoke of my cigarette,  
Wavered and failed.  
I was drowsing.  
And it seemed to me in my dream  
That I was riding  
To a low brown cluster of squat adobe houses  
Under the eaves of a red barren mesa,  
Where the track of a wagon trail paused, dipped,  
and vanished  
By a corral of rough plastered stone:  
And I saw in my dream,  
Looking down at the houses,  
An Indian with a red sash, flannel shirt and blue  
trousers,  
And a red band about his coarse black hair.  
Eyes dark as an antelope's  
Looked up at me:  
Sheep were feeding about him.  
And I said to him "Where do you come from?"  
And he replied  
"From Nazareth, beyond the desert,  
In Galilee."

## II

### MEXICAN QUARTER

By an alley lined with tumble-down shacks,  
And street-lamps askew, half-sputtering,  
Feebly glimmering on gutters choked with filth and  
dogs

Scratching their mangy backs:  
Half-naked children are running about,  
Women puff cigarettes in black doorways,  
Crickets are crying.  
Men slouch sullenly  
Into the shadows:  
Behind a hedge of cactus,  
The smell of a dead horse  
Mingles with the smell of tortillas frying.

And a girl in a black lace shawl  
Sits in a rickety chair by the square of an un-  
glazed window,  
And sees the explosion of the stars

Softly poised on a velvet sky.

And she is humming to herself: —

“ Stars, if I could reach you,

(You are so very clear that it seems as if I could  
reach you)

I would give you all to the Madonna's image,

On the grey-plastered altar behind the paper flowers,

So that Juan would come back to me,

And we could live again those lazy burning hours,

Forgetting the tap of my fan and my sharp words.

And I would only keep four of you,

Those two blue-white ones overhead,

To hang in my ears;

And those two orange ones yonder,

To fasten on my shoe-buckles.”

A little further along the street

A man sits stringing a brown guitar.

The smoke of his cigarette curls 'round his head,

And he too is humming, but other words:

“ Think not that at your window I wait;

New love is better, the old is turned to hate.

Fate! Fate! All things pass away;

Life is forever, youth is for a day.

Love again if you may

Before the stars are blown out of the sky,  
And the crickets die!  
Babylon and Samarkand  
Are mud walls in a waste of sand."



### III

#### CLIFF-DWELLING

The canyon is choked with stones and undergrowth;  
The heat that falls from the sky  
Beats at the walls, slides, and reverberates  
Down in a wave of grey dust and white fire:  
Stinging the mouth and eyes.

The ponies struggle and scramble,  
Half way up, along the canyon wall;  
Their listless riders seldom lift  
A weary hand to guide their feet;  
Stones are loosened and clatter  
Down to the sunbaked depths.

Nothing has ever lived here,  
Nothing could ever live here;  
Two hawks, screaming and wheeling,  
Rouse the eyes to look aloft.

Boldly poised in a shelf of the stone,  
Tiny walls peer down on us;  
Towers with little square windows.

When we plod up to them,  
And dismounting, fasten our horses;  
Suddenly a blue-grey flock of doves,  
Burst in a flutter of wings from the shadows.

Shards of pots and shreds of straw,  
Empty brush-roofed rooms in darkness;  
And the sound of water tinkling,  
A clock that ticks the centuries off to silence.

## IV

### THE WINDMILLS

The windmills, like great sunflowers of steel,  
Lift themselves proudly over the straggling houses;  
And at their feet the deep blue-green alfalfa  
Cuts the desert like the stroke of a sword.

Yellow melon flowers  
Crawl beneath the withered peach-trees;  
A date-palm throws its heavy fronds of steel  
Against the scoured metallic sky.

The houses, double-roofed for coolness,  
Cower amid the manzanita scrub.  
A man with jingling spurs  
Walks heavily out of a vine-bowered doorway,  
Mounts his pony, rides away.

The windmills stare at the sun.  
The yellow earth cracks and blisters.  
Everything is still.

In the afternoon  
The wind takes dry waves of heat and tosses them  
Mingled with dust, up and down the streets,  
Against the belfry with its green bells:

And, after sunset, when the sky  
Becomes a green and orange fan,  
The windmills, like great sunflowers on dried stalks,  
Stare hard at the sun they cannot follow.

Turning, turning, forever turning  
In the chill night-wind that sweeps over the valley,  
With the shriek and the clank of the pumps groaning  
    beneath them,  
And the choking gurgle of tepid water.

V

THE FUEL VENDOR

Up and down and up and down,  
Through the stony uplands every day,  
Where the dark blue peaks dream far away,  
Beating my donkey with a stick  
I go;  
To gather fuel for the town,  
Strips of dead greasewood, twisted, grey —

Where on the windblown edge of a cliff  
Yellow crumbling walls look far below,  
As they did centuries ago;  
When the Spaniards in their helmets  
With the banner of the cross  
Rode along;  
There I stop and break my fast.  
There dried onions and two pieces of bread,  
From a rag tied to my belt,  
And I drink  
From the wicker flask,

Daubed with yellow pitch outside,  
Slung at my donkey's shoulder.

Up and down and up and down,  
In the afternoon, through the streets of the town,  
Beating my donkey with a stick,  
I go.  
And the long rambling lines of houses,  
With grey plastered walls,  
Hear my calls;  
"Oyo, legno!"

My life is a stony plain,  
In which I gather twisted sticks;  
The heat and the strain  
Of hunger ever watching me,  
The rose-and-opal mystery  
Of the silence;  
And the peaks like great black altars of death  
Against the scarlet of the evening.

And after  
There will come a deeper silence,  
Broken by wind's laughter  
As it rattles a rickety worm-eaten cross  
Amid grey moonlight falling like ashes,

And the flight of pale thistle seeds,  
And the coyotes yapping somewhere afar off,  
Beyond a grave which no one heeds.

## VI

### RAIN IN THE DESERT

The huge red-buttressed mesa over yonder,  
Is merely a far-off temple where the sleepy sun is  
burning  
Its altar-fires of pinyon and of toyon for the day.

The old priests sleep, white-shrouded,  
Their pottery whistles lie beside them, the prayer-  
sticks closely feathered ;  
On every mummied face there glows a smile.

The sun is rolling slowly  
Beneath the sluggish folds of the sky-serpents,  
Coiling, uncoiling, blue-black, sparked with fires.

The old dead priests  
Feel in the thin dried earth that is heaped about  
them,  
Above the smell of scorching oozing pinyon,  
The acrid smell of rain.



And now the showers  
Surround the mesa like a troop of silver dancers:  
Shaking their rattles, stamping, chanting, roaring,  
Whirling, extinguishing the last red wisp of light.

August, 1915.

## THE SONG OF THE WIND

The wind that sizzles through the withered stalks of grasses in the heat of midsummer. The wind that comes up humming, buzzing, singing, tingling, ringing through the treeless plains. The wind that whispers its refrain from far away in the quivering heat. The wind that tosses the scarlet poppies and golden beards of wheat apart and flings them laughingly into the panting heart of the sky.

O, my soul of purple and gold, the earth is green, the sun is gold!

The wind that whoops, ho! ho! in the noonday. The wind that rattles like cavalry advancing. The wind that stamps and dances on the wrinkled face of earth, making it grin in a yellow smile. The wind that stops awhile and then comes on in multitudes, flickering, licking dry wavelets, screaming, fighting, tingling, tossing, clanging, prowling, growling, howling, rasping, soaring, crashing and ebbing away. The wind that frays out the upper cloud to plume-streamers of spray and spatters the sunlight in one blinding wave at my feet.

O my soul of scarlet and gold, the earth is white,  
the sun is gold!

The wind that flings sudden sharp spurts of  
glistening sand against the purple walls of after-  
noon. The wind that curls and murmurs evenly,  
pausing, retreating as if it sought a tree. The wind  
of the desert sounding, rebounding, twanging one  
low string against the stillness. The wind that  
shrieks in pain once and again as if touched by a  
sputter of flame from the sun's torch. The wind  
that blows steadily through the blue porch of eve-  
ning dry and languid reedy complaints.

O my soul of the blue and gold, the earth is cold,  
the sky is cold!

The wind that spins the stars upward in mad  
scattered chase of white flakes against the night.  
The wind that strews the earth with the green-  
grey ashes of the moon. The wind that screeches  
out of tune, dying away to an eerie whine like  
rockets plunging down in the darkness. The wind  
that comes from nowhere and suddenly bursts the  
blue-black bubble of hot air. The wind that  
quavers restlessly. The wind that stirs and flutters  
and starts with a jump, plunging away frantically  
into darkness. The wind that pours the emptiness  
of night down upon the earth in one black toppling

wave, through which the stars roar and smoke.  
The wind that chokes you with its thunderous cannonade.

Oh my soul of black and gold, the wind has pierced  
me with its shrilling arrows — its arrows barbed  
with scarlet, green and gold!

Summer, 1915.

## THE PASSING OF THE WEST

To the east rise the blue tips of the Rockies, to the west enormous orange-flecked tablelands. Between them, bands on bands of desert, dotted with gray sagebrush and chaparral, falling southward. Wallowing over its quicksands, ruddy brown, writhing in tumbled eddies, a straggling shallow river rushes down endlessly. A few clumps of sickly willows line either bank. Beyond, blank and empty, but for the interspersing of parched foliage, sun-blackened boulders, and prairie-dog holes, rolls the desert, mile beyond mile on either side, an endless wide space of silence spied upon by the jagged range of blue peaks from which the sun rose this morning, and the long line of great tablelands to which he will descend to-night. Now the sun moves neither to left nor right; he hangs dead overhead and fills all the air with the raging blaze of an August noon. The prairie dogs are asleep in their burrows; a rattle-snake lies motionless on a stone; even the coyote that loves to go slinking alone through the sagebrush, has hidden

himself somewhere and sleeps. Up above there is only the unwearied wheeling of an eagle from side to side turning and turning in endless wide circles around the sun. The desert below him seems burning: ashen-yellow, red-yellow, faint blue and rose brown. Not a cloud flake breaks with its shadow the great space of sky and of earth. Only the river glides on ever fretting with its shallow brown waters the dearth. Silence — the silence of noonday: not a whisper, not even a breath. The desert stands wide, free and open, and the sky is a blue ring of death.

To the south the great floor opens wider till it seems to crumble away under the blaze of day into fantastic island-masses, miraged peaks hanging in mid-air. To the north it closes up again, range on range of mountains staining with faint blue the horizon. Between these two the desert rests, without a break, without a path, without a track. Up the crannies of the westward canyons are tiny mud-baked houses, standing on cracked shelves of yellow stone. These are empty and deserted and their inhabitants are gone. Down to the south, the Spaniard came riding centuries ago, with his pikemen, mules, and musketeers, seeking Eldorado. Mission bells toll over the desert, lofty pueblos lift

old chants for rain. Northward, French and British traders cease their fighting, exchange beads for furs again. Spaniards, Frenchmen, British, Indians, each have been seeking Eldorado in their own way. Yet to this day the desert lies empty, a spot as lonely as when it was created, roamed over only by the buffalo and antelope. Now and then a little troop of Paiute Indians, mounted on lean ponies, lope through it, and an arrow or two brings down some old bull after a hard chase. Yet the path to Eldorado lies through this very place.

It is afternoon and a small herd of buffaloes have come down to the shallows to drink. The bulls stop about the brink to wallow in the mud, the cows nose among the stones for grass, the young calves are suckling from their mothers. Suddenly the eldest bull stops and looks up arrested by a strange sight. Over the desert, heading straight westward in a line like an arrow-flight, something is rolling slowly like an enormous snake, clouds of gray alkali dust rising and trailing in its wake. It dips and rises, dips and rises again, following the hummocks and hollows of the enormous plain. The old bulls stupidly pause to look at it, the cows are still browsing, nearer and nearer it comes with the sound of groaning axles, wheels

rattling, fiddles scraping "Good-bye Pike County," pans rattling and whips cracking — till a human eye could descry what it is: a caravan of ox-drawn prairie schooners covered with pale yellow canvas, going towards the setting sun. Suddenly a group of agile riders detach themselves from the mass. They have sighted the buffalo. Before the herd can pass the stream, or the grazing cows can be brought together, the leather-jacketed hunters are among them; shooting so close to the plunging brutes, that the blaze of the powder scorches the hide and burns the hair. Half an hour later, the oxen toil up and the wagons are drawn together in a great circle near to the banks of the stream. Fires of greasewood are lighted, the coffee pot sizzles, the fresh meat splutters, raw-boned loose-jointed men discuss the events of the day, gingham-aproned sun-bonnetted women are running about, children play under the canopy. . . . Slowly the sun sinks westward over the desert, spilling his glory as he goes, touching the eastward peaks to vermilion, sapphire, violet and rose. Stars hang in the sky like blinding faceted diamonds, night falls on the encampment, there is rough merrymaking. Over the face of the desert slither the coyotes, attracted by the smell of fresh meat, and they gather together



before morning, saluting the wagons with yappings endlessly repeated from all sides of the horizon. The stars pale and fade: the camp fires burn bright in the dawning, men with matted hair walk about yawning. Horses are caught and saddled, tethered cattle assemble, wagons roll off with a jolt and an oath across the ford, they rumble away going westward again and are swallowed up in silence. From aloft drop a troop of wheeling gray vultures scenting the carrion. Over the slopes of the Rockies pours the blue dawn.

To the east rise the blue tips of the Rockies; to the west, fantastic orange-flecked tablelands. Between them, in bands on bands, mile after mile, go the pioneers, seeking their fortunes or a grave. As yet the trail they follow is only a narrow track in the dust, down which goes bumping and thundering in a heavy coach drawn by six bay horses, the government mail. For now there is another state yonder, far behind those great tablelands and the white peaks to which they rise, a state set on the shores of another ocean where the east faces the west, where the worst mingles with the best, where men spend sackfuls of gold dust for a letter, and fight each other with knives over a handful of flour. The dream of Eldorado has come true, at last,

and the Spaniard's hope, the Englishman's achievement sink into the past. Yet this news does not run very far here in the desert. The antelopes still browse where they choose, the buffalo still disputes the right of way with every despatch rider. The Paiutes and Navahoes that pass on their ponies have a few more rifles, that is all. Here and there, beside the trail, there are the bones of dead horses and cattle, the skeleton framework of overturned wagons, or a pile of stones six by three to mark that human burial is as cheap as fortune and fame. For the rest the face of the desert is precisely the same.

Then one day come the cattle, driven out from their ranges in Texas to seek the fresh grass of Wyoming pastures. They roll out of the south in strings of a thousand, deep red or smoky black beasts, broadhorned steers tossing their muzzles and pawing, cows lowing, calves bawling; bronze-faced horsemen in chaparejos, riding around them, whooping and calling and whirling their lariats. At the ford, there is tumult and commotion, many get sucked into the quicksands impelled by others, and there are oaths and yells. Finally the scene is quietened. The cattle have gone, and the desert, a little trampled on, quickly resumes its old aspect.

Here and there a buzzard or a watchful Indian is feeding: that is all.

So fall and winter pass and in the spring a surveying party carefully go over the road. Long bands of shining steel begin to be laid out from east to west, till at last they meet on the desert's breast. The smoky trains thunder from Manhattan to Wagon Wheel Gap, from the crossings of the Platte to the Great Divide, from the Sierras to the Golden Gate. One force alone remains to challenge fate, that iron monster that sweeps across a continent devouring time in his stride. The great buffalo herd, worried upon its flanks, moves southward in autumn in serried ranks across the desert. In the very eye of the arrested trains they pass, slowly, and with deliberation all day. In that packed mass of shaggy magnificence are twenty thousand heads, mere remnant of the innumerable herds that once roamed every prairie west of the Mississippi. Now they go slowly, snorting in anger at the shrieking black locomotive that dares not cut through their living wall of flesh. Till they are gone, progress is caught up in the mesh of the desert and the mails are delayed. But the narrow double band of steel rails is untroubled, and it bides its time knowing that soon again train after train

will go thundering across the plain, binding the two halves of the continent together, west waiting on east and east creating the west, shuttle on shuttle passing over the desert's gray breast.

Bands of hunters converge on a spot beyond the Rockies a few years later for a great killing. The last remnant of the buffalo herd is slaughtered and the bitter water of the salt-licks dyed red. The sun hangs dizzily over a blue peak to westward till the last of the shaggy bulls, shaking his head, and pawing the ground in agony, is gone. Then it sinks in a vast splendor of ebbing flame over the desert which, from this time on, is lifeless. So day after day goes by, peering over the peaks to the eastward and dying away into the grey waste in silence. Then suddenly one morning the sagebrush is filled with the warning gallop of ponies and hundreds of naked copper-brown bodies, smeared with red and black paint, flash past. The Sioux have broken loose at last, and are sweeping eastward from their reservation upon the outposts of civilization. A little troop of cavalry, hastily summoned, is surrounded; the troopers shoot down their horses, and lying behind improvised breastworks, keep firing in an irregular circle, around which go careering and yelling, clinging low to their ponies' necks and

shooting arrows as they gallop, the Redskins. At last, by night, the ammunition of the whites is exhausted; and Sitting Bull, the chief who led his tribesmen to the war, can draw forth his enemy's smoking heart and gaze upon it where it lies in his hand. But soon more bands of cavalry arrive, rushed up by trains, and once again the unequal contest is joined, white man against red, science against savagery. The Indians are driven back, the wolf, the bear, the elk, disappear in their last fastnesses, ranches are laid out in the desert, and the ring of civilization closes in. Passing, forever passing is the west! Passing is the wild free life of the desert — the open air, the chaparral, the boundless waste, the blue sky over all! Passing, departing, vanishing, not to be sung, not to be remembered, not to be known. The last great stretch of sunlight, of loneliness, of silence, is forever gone.

To the east rise the blue tips of the Rockies, to the west enormous orange-flecked tablelands. Between them rolls the river as of old, but a man's hand might almost span it. All of its water but a trickle flows in irrigation ditches, past patches of intense blue-green alfalfa. The fields are divided from each other by wind-breaks of tall poplars, and in between them rise glittering windmills, white-

painted houses and red barns. Automobiles roll past on smooth level roads, and on summer porticoes people sit fanning themselves, sipping ice-water, dipping into cheap magazines, discussing fruit crops and the victory of prohibition. The sun sinks slowly over an orange-colored mesa to westward and through the thin, lightly quivering air rises the blue smoke from the houses.

1916-1920.

## SONGS OF THE ARKANSAS

### INVOCATION

Eastward, House where the Sun is kindled:  
Northward, Cave where the Wind sleeps in darkness:

Southward, Swamp where the Snake-Mist rises:  
Westward, Plain where the Ghost-Trail goes:

Hear my prayer!

I bow myself to the quarters;  
I salute Sun and Earth, my parents;  
Let my brother and sister, Wind and Water,  
Carry my cry to Him-Who-Dwells-Beyond:

Many things have I to say unto you:  
Spirit who will not listen!  
Many things have I and my people on our hearts,  
Many great griefs.

Many chiefs! Many warriors! Many young men!  
Many women! Many dogs! Many weapons!

Are You but a thieving Shawnee  
To take these things from our tribe?

Wherefore do You now abandon us?  
Came we out of the deadly land of darkness,  
Out of the land of cold long nights and winters,  
Only to die in this place?

Did the great river that Your Finger traced  
Then deceive us with its current?  
Did the wild goose and the heron  
Fly southward but to mock us?

You who baited this trap with enemies,  
Tell us where we may wander,  
We weary, we footsore, we lost, we forsaken,—  
Where is our changeless home?

Men with white faces and lying hearts  
Have you now sent out amongst us:  
We received them — we believed it was Your will:  
Lo, what they have done to us!

We know You to be our Father,  
We know all might and craft are in You;



Save the Fire You have kindled,  
We have no other light!

Help the sick: comfort the aged:  
Give victory to our warriors:  
Rob not the mothers of children:  
Send not famine upon us!

The green corn that waves in the sunlight  
Is Yours, the grey forest also;  
Without the sun You made for us,  
The trail is lost in darkness.

You breathe into our nostrils  
The fire; then wherefore does it fail?  
You will not let it perish,  
All that You do is good.

To the East, bird's song uprising;  
To the North, rustling forests;  
To the South, wide-sweeping rivers,  
To the West, the sigh of grass:

Hear our prayer!

I bow myself to the quarters ;  
I salute Sun and Earth, my parents.  
Once more the song has gone forth,  
Like smoke it has vanished in sunlight.

## WOMEN'S SONG AT THE TIME OF THE GREEN-CORN DANCE

Sprout, green corn, on the bosom of earth, your  
mother,

Thrust out your thin green spears to the warm  
grey rain;

Grow, green corn, the deer shall not trample near  
you,

Leap, green corn, the winter of earth is past.

Shake, green corn, the deer on the trails are leaping;

Blush, green corn, pink tassels amid your leaves;

Ripple and rustle, start and shake and flutter,

Grow, green corn, it is your grains we would eat.

Smile, green corn, gold ornaments in the sunlight,

Dew-beads of silver glistening in twisted hair:

Bend to the wind, draw the deer closer to you,

Grow, ever grow — your sorrows will soon be great.

Wither, o corn, under the heat of the summer,

Watch, o corn, the deer feeding far away,

Struggle, o corn, break your slender silken sheathing,  
Rejoice, o corn, for the burden of the tasseled ears!

Break your sheath, for it is the time of the harvest,  
The swift footed deer are stealing the ripening grain;  
Weep in the wind, let it tear into ribbons your  
    beauty,  
The life you brought from the earth is taken again.

Creak, old corn, rustle your aching body,  
Crack, old corn, spill out your decaying seeds;  
The young deer, far away, are fighting together,  
The old deer, sick and feeble, drowse in your shade.

Perish, old corn, on the bosom of earth, your mother,  
Thrust back to her silence the thin roots of your  
    pain;  
Let the heavy snow of the winter be heaped in you  
    where you are hidden,  
Soon enough you will awaken to the selfsame sorrow  
    again.

## WAR-SONG

It is the seventh day of vigil;  
Silent, haggard, and sleepless  
We wait for news from our trackers  
To learn if the omens be good.

Wherefore has the Sun-Spirit  
Put trouble into our hearts?  
Dark clouds fly upwards bringing the thunder,  
War comes stalking near our home.

The burden of hunger and death  
Weighs on our hearts and rifles;  
No word from the restless heavens,  
No smoke from the beacon-fires:

The yellow-faces steal out silently,  
Broken by the ordeal;  
Shunned by the women  
They slink away to the woods.

The Chief lifts up his voice in prayer.

“ Eagle, war eagle,  
Sailing, wheeling near us,  
Spirit that shrieks in air,  
Spirit that fights the wind,  
Spirit that looks at the sun,  
Put courage in our hearts.

“ Long ago our fathers,  
Like eagles after the rabbit,  
Pursued the Chickasaw.

“ That they might have chance to battle,  
In silence they offered their own powder  
With looks and gestures of scorn.

“ The Chickasaw accepted,  
They loaded, made ready for battle.

“ One flash from the muskets,  
One volley of red death ;  
Then wheeling, screaming, eagles,  
They closed in with the hatchet.

“ Eagle, war-eagle,  
The plumes are stained with crimson death :  
Spirit that dares the lightning!

Spirit that rides the cyclone!  
Spirit that wings a way amid the stars,  
Put courage in our hearts."

The trackers have returned  
With weary eyes.

Silently we paint our faces,  
Silently sharpen the hatchets,  
Silently to every warrior  
Is given the eagle-plume.

Out of doors the women cry:

"Snake, rattlesnake,  
Coiling, creeping, near us,  
Spirit of the hidden ways of earth,  
Spirit holding the fluttering bird with your eyes,  
Spirit that strikes but once, and glides away,  
Give craftiness to our men!

"Forget not, how the Osages  
Would have slain you.

"They led you forth to the forest,  
And, when the night fell,

Swearing with many oaths  
That the enemy were near,  
They crept to their secret ambush  
Saying you must attack when the moon began to  
rise.

“ But a snake had whispered to your chief  
Many cunning thoughts.—

“ With full hands he bade you pile  
Branches on the campfires,  
And withdraw into the shadows.

“ A flash, a yell,  
Out burst the traitors:  
Towards the fire they leapt  
Like wolves, with howling laughter.

“ But you awaited,  
You did not utter a sound.  
And when the astonished faces glowed clearly in  
the firelight,  
You gave them volley on volley.

“ Snake, rattlesnake,  
Your fangs have met in quivering flesh.



Spirit that bides its moment,  
Spirit that knows the spot to strike,  
Spirit of the secret lurking-places,  
Give craftiness to our men."

The song is silent.  
Far off into the sky there lifts a long blue plume  
    of smoke  
From the distant hills.

It is the great war-signal.  
We stagger from the council-lodge,  
The women fly with shrieks.

The seven-day fast is broken,  
Silent, haggard and sleepless,  
We double into the forest,  
Like blood-scenting wolves.

## DEATH-SONG

Burn the lodge, break the weapons,  
Let the pure fire eat him wholly,  
For his Father the Sun has called him  
Into the West.

Nihahani! He has departed  
On the long, lone trail of darkness;  
Not a friend to guide his footsteps,  
Enemies on every side near him,  
Into the flooded plains.

Bring food to him at sunset,  
He is tired.

Nihahani! The woods vanish:  
Empty wastes all sides surround him,  
Buffaloes fly from his wavering shadow,  
Saw-grass cuts his bleeding feet.

Break jars of water on the mound,  
For he is thirsty and would drink.

Nihahani! he is captured:  
Raven-spirits drag him fainting  
To the hollow cave of darkness,  
Into the hole of torment.  
Leap into the fire at last,  
You who love him  
Bring him aid!

Cease, for the food is not eaten;  
Cease, for your offerings rot on the poles;  
Cease, for the grave-mound is covered with grass,  
And we are very few,  
What will become of our tribe if we sacrifice his  
sons,  
How will we ever accomplish vengeance upon our  
foes?

Nihahani! He sleeps with his fathers;  
Day by day his mother brings him  
Deer that his own arrows have slaughtered,  
Arrows sped by his son's hands.  
But for us, who will burn the lodges,  
Who will ever cover the grave-mound with rich  
spoil?

February, 1915.

## IN THE CITY OF NIGHT

(To the Memory of Edgar Allan Poe)

City of night,  
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of twilight,  
City that projects into the west,  
City whose columns rest upon the sunset, city of  
square, threatening masses blocking out the light:  
City of twilight,  
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of midnight, city that the full moon over-  
flows, city where the cats prowl and the closed iron  
dust-carts go rattling through the shadows:

City of midnight,  
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of early morning, cool fresh-sprinkled city,  
city whose sharp roof peaks are splintered against  
the stars, city that unbars tall haggard gates in pity,

City of midnight,  
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of rain, city where the bleak wind batters the  
hard drops once and again, sousing a shivering,  
cursing beggar who clings amid the stiff Apostles  
on the cathedral portico;

City where the glare is dull and lowering, city  
where the clouds flare and flicker as they pass up-  
wards, where sputtering lamps stare into the muddy  
pools beneath them;

City where the winds shriek up the streets and  
tear into the squares, city whose cobbles quiver and  
whose pinnacles waver before the buzzing chatter of  
raindrops in their flight;

City of midnight,  
Drench me with your rain of sorrow.

City of vermilion curtains, city whose windows  
drip with crimson, tawdry, tinselled, sensual city,  
throw me pitilessly into your crowds.

City filled with women's faces leering at the  
passers by,

City with doorways always open, city of silks and  
swishing laces, city where bands bray dance-music  
all night in the plaza,

City where the overscented light hangs tepidly,  
stabbed with jabber of the crowd, city where the  
stars stare coldly, falsely smiling through the smoke-  
filled air,

City of midnight,  
Smite me with your despair.

City of emptiness, city of the white façades, city  
where one lonely dangling lantern wavers aloft like  
a taper before a marble sarcophagus, frightening  
away the ghosts;

City where a single white-lit window in a motion-  
less blackened house-front swallows the hosts of  
darkness that stream down the street towards it;

City above whose dark tree-tangled park emerges  
suddenly, unlit, uncannily, a grey ghostly tower  
whose base is lost in the fog, and whose summit has  
no end.

City of midnight,  
Bury me in your silence.

City of night,  
Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of restlessness, city where I have tramped  
and wandered,

City where the herded crowds glance at me suspiciously, city where the churches are locked, the shops unopened, the houses without hospitality,

City of restlessness,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of sleeplessness, city of cheap airless rooms, where in the gloom are heard snores through the partition, lovers that struggle, couples that squabble, cabs that rattle, cats that squall,

City of sleeplessness,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

City of feverish dreams, city that is being besieged by all the demons of darkness, city of innumerable shadowy vaults and towers, city where passion flowers desperately and treachery ends in death the strong:

City of night,

Wrap me in your folds of shadow.

February, 1915.

## A M E R I C A

1916

From the sea-coast, from the bleak ravines of the hills that lift their bare escarpments towards the sky that pours down pitiless threads of sunlight, whirls over chill clinging tentacles of rain, smashes hard buffets of huge wind, sifts fine quivering drifts of snow, thrashes with thunder and with hail, uncurls its great sodden flapping curtains before the gale — from the marshlands, from the banks of slow rivers, from the still brown plateaus, from the midst of steaming valleys, from the wide bays ringed with peaks — a thousand cities reek into the sky. Through a million vents the smell of cookery overflows. It rises upwards day and night in strange tragic black rows of smoke that glow and make the stars quiver, and dance and darken the sunlight.

Green billows of corn, golden seas of wheat, white lakes of cotton meet and fuse and intercross. Cattle string across in frightened procession; multitudes on multitudes of horses, black, dun, grey, gallop away after them, jarring the earth with their



hoofs, beating up dust in heavy fluffy clouds. Far away the sun lies still over broad patches of silence, sparsely green, where an eagle hovers or an antelope starts up or a sly half-starving coyote is seen. The sun looks into yellow castles wedged in the cliff that were old when the first explorers saw them, and on white bulging palaces tinselled with marble and gold. The sun sees engines that rattle and cough, black derricks that wave their arms in circles aloft, crazy log cabins toppling into the marsh. On every side are symbols of man's desire made with his hands, hurried, glorious, sordid, tragic, clashing, insane; the sun looks down and does not understand but pours over them its heat, and cold, and rain, and light, and lightning, always the same.

Immense machines are clamouring, rattling, battling, wheeling, screaming, heaving, weaving. The wheels moan and groan and roar and waver and snap — and go on as before. Between the cities, over plain and hill, reel double paths of shining steel, where screaming locomotives pass like black shuttles leaving grey trails of smoke amid the wheat, the cattle, the corn, the cotton, the sordid, hideous factory-shafts, the fleet masses of plunging and galloping stallions. Their force is never spent or tired, for nervously above them, earth is laced

and wired with crackling, chattering, singing, whispering electricity. They fly from city to city, and the sky is scribbled above them with childish grey gigantic scrawls amid which the sun wobbles and crawls. And over all shoot backwards and forwards words that walk in the air, and perhaps not for long will the upper spaces be still and bare, but will soon be filled with racing lines of strong black-bird-machines bearing men on their backs. Purring autos squawk and squeal and spray and flutter, pale flashes through the rack. Red and black and yellow the earth takes on its coat of colours, from the struggle of a hundred million hands. It is a palimpsest which no one reads or understands, which none has time to heed, a loom-frame woven over with interspersed entangled threads, of which the meaning is lost, from which the pattern is not yet freed.

Amid all this men struggle, surge, call out, fall choking, toil with backs bent over the earth in black arcs. Crowds of them clatter, scramble, bustle, push, and drift away. They creep, black, greasy masses out of the earth like ants; they swing out on great frozen blocks of steel or marble over space; they saunter in some forgotten place; they yawn with the weariness of little towns. Men, brown, black, yellow, pallid with fatigue, ruddy with

gluttony, blotched with disease, swarm and waver back and forth, east, west, south, north. Crackling twigs of sombre dripping forest mark their feet. Red wet furrowed plains receive their pains. Grey hungry factory towns bellow out through steam-filled lungs for them each morning. Prison gates grate slowly, hospital beds spread stateliness, insane asylums gibber through their windows. They hustle and shovel, piling heaps of hovels, and now and then as if in mockery some coppery tower that seems as if it would split the sky with its majesty. They are a great shallow sea, crinkling uneasily as if some giant's body were wallowing beneath. Some single impulse creeps through them, pouring its breath out of the chimneys, scattering itself over the fields, closing itself in behind the doors. It is one great vague inchoate organism, scarcely feeling its pulse as yet, rolling in the belly of the world, waiting its hour of birth. Earth is heaped about it; still it eats the earth away, red covering after red covering, day on day. Now it half timidly peeps out, now withdraws itself again. And still the sky pours on it heat and rain and wind and light and lightning and hail, shaping it, making it less frail, more fit to wake and take its place in the world.

But over there, beyond the seas, where for years the war flags have been stacked and furled, comes the crack of a pistol followed by faint cheers. And now a smeary gloom appears, it seems to swell from out the earth; it emerges in greenish folds above the horizon, and in its depths are flashes from far-off guns. Suddenly from the heart of the cloud, which the cowed world watches holding its breath, come thick insensate hammer blows that split the core of earth asunder — the iron cannon unleashed for the dance of death. Deeper and deeper the noise unrolls in a vast salute to the new world from the old. It rises higher and higher covering the sea with its tumult and filling the sky with goutts and spatters of crimson fire. North, south, east, west, all the craters are emptying out their vitals upon earth's breast. But the immensity of the troubled continent stirs not nor gives to the world the life that is restlessly heaving beneath it.

The centuries sit with hands upon their knees, wearing on weary foreheads the stamp of their destinies. The sun glares, the rain spatters, the thunder tramples his drums, the wind, rushing, hums its scorn — but the being — the thing that will master all the ages — still refuses to be born. The great derricks, black and frozen, lift their arms in mid-

air; the locomotives hoot and mutter with despair; the shuttles clatter and clamour and hammer at the woof day and night. The black flight of priceless instants reels and rebounds and shivers and crawls while without the uproar of the cannon calls like black seas battering the earth, grinding, sweeping, flickering, pounding, pounding, pounding in the increasing throes of birth. But still the thing will not arrive — still it refuses at the very gates of life. America! — America! — blood-stained and torn with choked, convulsive sighs, perhaps too late thou shalt arise, perhaps in vain shalt seek to rule the earth!

Spring, 1916.

## THE POEM OF MIST

Mist on the Atlantic coast. Wind that whistles, driving the blue, steel-cut sea steadily inland, past dark headlands. Sand and granite, trap-rock and scrub. Beyond these, mile after mile, a continent of forests, out of which twelve great rivers, Merri-mac, Connecticut, Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna, Potomac, James, Roanoke, Peedee, and Santee, Savannah and Altamaha, rise and pour their waters into the ocean. A coast unvisited by men, though now and then some lithe, smooth-bodied Indian paddles a canoe through a blue backwater, fringed with reeds, while a fleet of sea-gulls, their bodies oscillating, wheel and dance above it. A coast that is then silent for eternity.

Suddenly through the blue-grey mist, loom three high-pooped shells; the caravels. Far off to sea, beyond sight they drift, going southward. The mist parts to let them through, and they float the flag of Spain into a tropic ocean. Cathay is lost, but a continent is gained, and the copper-bodied paint-stained natives look sufficiently like the in-

habitants of the East to justify their names. The news travels to Europe, where people have feasted on tales of isles of spice and gold for generations, and every shipmaster polishes up his chart and writes Terra Nova on the other side of the Atlantic. The blazing red cross of Spain, the golden lilies of France, the red lion of Holland, the red-white-and-blue-barred Union Jack of England advance, stand and fly on American soil — desolate hemlock forests, wild rice savannahs where the muskrat swims, dim snow-drifted northern plains, woods where the wolf howls all night, all these salute them. Thousands on thousands of men go out to the new found world to die. In Massachusetts Puritans fight with famine; in Virginia Cavaliers struggle with fever. Was there ever a new world not born through death, horror, desolation? As yet the new world belongs to no nation: nor will it be free for itself until the dead are drifted deep and the red men sleep and the buffalo tide flows away from the plains and the old world breaks its agelong chains.

Mist is drifting in from the Atlantic, curling, whirling, waiting, gyrating. Mist drifts in over colonial towns and block-houses, over frontier-posts and red-coat soldiery. Northward and eastward looms the blazing fair star of France, southward

and westward the dead red planet of Spain. But, in between, blue, blue, floats the mist and it brings with it a breed, a speech, a tradition. Men sit reading King James' Bible in wigwams on the barren lands where caribou stamp, and in the damp sweltering heat amid mournful cypress-swamps men sit at their ease, smoking and quoting Shakespeare. The mist fades out and the sky is clear, clear to the west where the sun hangs red, lighting up plain after plain that dips down from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River, rising slowly westward again to the Rockies afar. The star of France and the star of England have met and set, and out of them is born a new world.

Guns that thunder on a sweltering August day around Yorktown. For three months the British are cooped in, thanks to the French command of sea and land; then when September burns out the embers of autumn, and winter is at hand, they surrender. Squire Washington, who has waited with patience for this moment, since the day, over five years ago, when he drew his sword in command of his country, rides homewards; and in December, a treaty is signed at Paris, whereby thirteen petty and rebellious colonies are allowed to go their way in peace. Rochambeau and Lafayette, to whom the



release is greatly owing, sail for France; and ten years later, the rotten fabric of aristocracy there collapses, and the people dance the Carmagnole around the guillotine. Slowly the American scene changes, the people pressing steadily westward. Generation after generation conquer the hard path to the Mississippi, the way across the prairie, towards the setting sun.

Mist hangs heavily on the Atlantic and a great three-masted ship waits off the shore, her topsails rattling and slapping in the faint puffs of breeze. Men aboard her are taking soundings and the skipper stands anxiously at the wheel. Slowly from afar steal the clouds, crawling above the mist invisibly, coming with cohorts of thunder. Lightning strikes at the sea and the ship staggers with the first faint shock of the gale, nosing her way out to seaward, while the crew swarm aloft and furl the sail — crying we'll roll — ay — we'll furl — ay — we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots. Far away at the roots of the sea, a hurricane is rising, sweeping with surprising fury at the mist, tearing it away, heeling clippers homeward, driving them on to concealed reefs and shoals. The great ship, gleaming with brass and paint, under bare poles, rolls horribly in the tempest.

War rises like a dark cloud, shrouding the young exultant country in its folds. For three years Lee keeps the North at bay. General after General is defeated — McClellan at the Peninsula, Burnside at Fredericksburg, Hooker at Chancellorsville. Lincoln sitting like a tragic king in the White House, kneels and prays in his homely way that the Lord will spare the North another disaster. Gettysburg and Vicksburg is the answer, and the South, defeated, reels heavily. But when the last battle is fought and the last bullet is sped, Lincoln, too lies dead. And the victorious North, its conquest done, dreams of nothing better than of filling the continent with prosperity from the factories of the East to the coast of the setting sun. Prosperity spells dollars for the coffers of the few; cheap immigrant labour for the many; any corrupt government for the new Union either South or North. The word is gone forth that in God and the dollar we trust and any other régime is relegated to the forgotten past, and its dust.

Mist is blown by the wind across the coast of New England every summer, trailing inland, vanishing among sterile farms laid out among granite boulders, where grey decaying colonial farmhouses gaze hopelessly over junipers and mossy rotten

orchards, and fallen stone fences half overgrown. Mist blows and as it goes it whispers echoes of the past. Old crazy faces creep to windows and peer out to listen to it as it whispers to them of ships — ships of Portland, of Salem, of Newport, and New Bedford, clipper-ships and whalers, privateers and Cape Horn limejuicers, bringing gold, ivory, spices and fruit. Old hands smooth tremulously faded silks, old eyes peer hopelessly into Bibles. The age of ships is gone, the age of iron begun. Mills whirl their spindles, railroads carry the grain of the West to ports. The New England farms lie fallow and deserted and over their loneliness the red and yellow leaves of Autumn looming through the mist light torches, flashing in despair to the black hemlocks over there, like a group of Indians watchful and ready. Time flies steadily on, to the tune of the looms, and millions flow into New England's thrifty portals. But the energy, the vitality, is sapped and gone.

Squadrons are moving, grey through the mists of spring, on their way to France. Squadrons of troop-ships, guarded by cruisers, going forth into the unknown, into the battle the Allies cannot gain, into the dark ominous future. The din of cheering

dies down to a whisper, the salutes of tooting tugs to a sigh. Has the new world joined the old at last? Will there be row on row of new low crosses on the blood-soaked soil of France to mark that America was willing to take her chance with the rest of the world? Soon enough the answer is heard — the thunder of guns proclaiming the armistice. Germany gives up the struggle and all is over. All? Ah, but the mists hover and curl, advancing, retreating over the low eastern coast, silencing every cry, every boast, every peal of victory!

Mist hangs flat and sluggish, unstirring, unshaken. Underneath its touch the country will not waken. Fat and prosperous, it will slip easily to sleep, though discontent smoulders, though rebellion mutters at its gates. The fates have sent it too easy a task, to spin dreams out of mist, to weave ropes of foam and sand. It has forgotten the past of Athens, of Persia, of Crete, of Carthage, of Egypt, of Rome, of many a great empire that laid its trust only on material good. Though food be scarce and drink be lacking, though labour be in revolt and trade be declining, it will go on, finding its visions in the mist that hangs unstirring, though through and beyond it comes the loud crash of waves shak-

ing the granite, beating like inexorable drums of fate, sounding with boom on boom:—each one a sombre minute-gun to mark the years that must elapse before the moment of its doom.

June, 1920.

## LINCOLN

### I

Like a gaunt, scraggly pine  
Which lifts its head above the mournful sandhills;  
And patiently, through dull years of bitter silence,  
Untended and uncared for, starts to grow.

Ungainly, labouring, huge,  
The wind of the north has twisted and gnarled its  
    branches;  
Yet in the heat of mid-summer days, when thunder  
    clouds ring the horizon,  
A nation of men shall rest beneath its shade.

And it shall protect them all,  
Hold everyone safe there, watching aloof in silence;  
Until at last, one mad stray bolt from the zenith  
Shall strike it in an instant down to earth.

## II

There was a darkness in this man; an immense and  
hollow darkness,  
Of which we may not speak, nor share with him nor  
enter;  
A darkness through which strong roots stretched  
downwards into the earth,  
Towards old things;

Towards the herdman-kings who walked the earth  
and spoke with God,  
Towards the wanderers who sought for they knew  
not what, and found their goal at last;  
Towards the men who waited, only waited pa-  
tiently when all seemed lost,  
Many bitter winters of defeat;

Down to the granite of patience,  
These roots swept, knotted fibrous roots, prying,  
piercing, seeking,  
And drew from the living rock and the living  
waters about it,  
The red sap to carry upwards to the sun.

Not proud, but humble,  
Only to serve and pass on, to endure to the end  
    through service,  
For the axe is laid at the roots of the trees, and  
    all that bring not forth good fruit  
Shall be cut down on the day to come and cast into  
    the fire.

## III

There is a silence abroad in the land to-day,  
And in the hearts of men, a deep and anxious  
    silence;  
And, because we are still at last, those bronze lips  
    slowly open,  
Those hollow and weary eyes take on a gleam of  
    light.

Slowly a patient, firm-syllabled voice cuts through  
    the endless silence,  
Like labouring oxen that drag a plough through  
    the chaos of rude clay-fields;  
“I went forward as the light goes forward in early  
    Spring,



But there were also many things which I left behind.

“Tombs that were quiet;  
One, of a mother, whose brief light went out in  
the darkness,  
One of a loved one, the snow on whose grave is  
long falling,  
One only of a child, but it was mine.

“Have you forgotten your graves? Go, question  
them in anguish,  
Listen long to their unstirred lips. From your  
hostages to silence  
Learn there is no life without death, no dawn with-  
out sun-setting,  
No victory but to him who has given all.”

The clamour of cannon dies down, the furnace-  
mouth of the battle is silent,  
The midwinter sun dips and descends, the earth  
takes on afresh its bright colours.  
But he whom we mocked and obeyed not, he whom  
we scorned and mistrusted,  
He has descended, like a god, to his rest.

Over the uproar of cities,

Over the million intricate threads of life weaving  
and crossing,  
In the midst of problems we know not, tangling,  
perplexing, ensnaring,  
Rises one white tomb alone.

Beam over it, stars,  
Wrap it 'round, stripes — stripes red for the pain  
that he bore for you —  
Enfold it forever, O, flag, rent, soiled, but repaired  
through your anguish;  
Long as you keep him there safe, the nations shall  
bow to your law.

Strew over him flowers:  
Blue forget-me-nots from the north and the bright  
pink arbutus  
From the east, and from the west rich orange  
blossom,  
But from the heart of the land take the passion-  
flower;

Rayed, violet, dim,  
With the nails that pierced, the cross that he bore  
and the circlet,

And beside it there lay also one lonely snow-white  
magnolia,  
Bitter for remembrance of the healing which has  
passed.

April 19th, 1916.







TRENT UNIVERSITY



0 1164 0048340 4

PS3511 .L457B7 1921  
Fletcher, John Gould  
Breakers and granite

DATE

ISSUED TO

222611

222611

